

12. B. H. C.

DOCTRINAL AND OCCASIONAL
S E R M O N S.

PREACHED

By JOHN ERSKINE, D. D. K

One of the MINISTERS of the OLD GRAYFRIARS
CHURCH, EDINBURGH.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR W. CREECH, AND AR. CONSTABLE,
AND

15

DOCTRINAL AND OCCASIONAL

SERMONS



LONDON: PRINTED FOR W. CROFT, AND AL. COOPER, 1825.

ADVERTISEMENT.

If the Author's life and health allow, a volume, chiefly on Practical Subjects, will be prepared for the Press.

CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE I.

The Qualifications necessary for Teachers of
Christianity.

JAMES iii. 1. *My brethren, be not many masters,
knowing that we shall receive the greater
condemnation* - - - Page 1

DISCOURSE II.

Ministers cautioned against giving Offence.

2 COR. vi. 3. *Giving no offence in any thing,
that the ministry be not blamed* - - p. 46

DISCOURSE III.

The Blessing of Christian Teachers.

ISAIAH xxx. 20. *Thine eyes shall see thy teach-
ers* - - - p. 83

CONTENTS.

v

DISCOURSE IV.

IN TWO PARTS.

Difficulties of the Pastoral Office.

2 COR. ii. 10. *Who is sufficient for these things?* - - - - - p. 118

DISCOURSE V.

IN TWO PARTS.

Motives for hearing Sermons.

PROV. viii. 33, 34. *Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors* - p. 141

DISCOURSE VI.

IN THREE PARTS.

Directions for hearing Sermons.

LUKE viii. 18. *Take heed, therefore, how ye hear* - - - - - p. 170

76

DISCOURSE VII.

Instructions and Consolations from the Unchangeableness of Christ.

HEBREWS xiii. 8. *Jefus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever* p. 220

DISCOURSE VIII.

The Agency of God in Human Greatness.

I CHRON. xxix. 12. *In thine hand it is to make great* p. 240

Historical Appendix p. 262

DISCOURSE IX.

IN THREE PARTS.

The People of God considered as all Righteous.

ISAIAH ix. 21. *Thy people also shall be all righteous* p. 278

DISCOURSE X.

IN TWO PARTS.

The important Mystery of the Incarnation.

I TIM. iii. 15, 16. *The pillar and ground of truth, and without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh* p. 328

Appendix.—*The common reading* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

vindicated - - - - - p. 369

DISCOURSE XI.

Jesus justified in the Spirit.

1 TIMOTHY iii. 16. *God was manifest in the
flesh, justified in the Spirit* - - - p. 373

DISCOURSE XII.

Jesus seen of Angels.

1 TIM. iii. 16. —*Seen of angels* - - - p. 385

DISCOURSE XIII.

Jesus preached unto the Gentiles.

1 TIM. iii. 16. —*Preached unto the Gentiles* p. 402

DISCOURSE XIV.

Jesus believed on in the World.

1 TIM. iii. 16. —*Believed on in the world* p. 417

DISCOURSE XV.

Jesus received up into Glory.

1 TIM. iii. 16. —*Received up into glory* - p. 427

DISCOURSE XVI.

IN THREE PARTS.

Power given to Christ for blessing the Elect.

JOHN xvii. 2. *As thou hast given him power
over all flesh, that he should give eternal life
to as many as thou hast given him* - P. 443

Discourses I. II. & IX. have been formerly published.

ERRATA.

- p. 33. l. 4. from the foot—*for* A due mixture—*read* V. A due mixture
p. 138. Note ^a—*for* The late—*read* The reverend
p. 481. l. 3. from the foot—*for* even they cannot move—*read* they cannot move even

DISCOURSE I.

THE QUALIFICATIONS NECESSARY FOR TEACHERS OF
CHRISTIANITY.

Preached before the SYNOD of GLASGOW and AYR,
At GLASGOW, October 2. 1750.

JAMES iii. 1.

MY BRETHREN, BE NOT MANY MASTERS, KNOWING THAT WE SHALL
RECEIVE THE GREATER CONDEMNATION.

THE words, in the original, might have been better rendered thus, *Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall undergo a severer judgment*^a; and were occasioned by certain novices, assuming the office of teachers, when utterly unqualified for it. The meaning of them is, the office of a spiritual instructor is attended with great difficulty and danger, and the duties of it are hard to be discharged. Let not, therefore, every man rush into that office. Let none undertake it rashly, and while destitute of the gifts and graces necessary for so sacred a function; for teachers, as well as hearers, must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. God will require more from teachers, than from others; and their private miscarriages, or unfaithfulness to the duties of their office, will expose them to the severest punishment.

Inattention to this solemn charge, in ministers and candidates for the ministry, is one unhappy source of

B

the

^a See Whitby's Notes, and Bishop Bull's Sermon on this passage.

the low state of religion in the christian world. If we had juster ideas of the difficulty and importance of the ministerial office, this might prevent our devoting ourselves to it from selfish motives, as it would prevent us from acting a mean and contemptible part when engaged in it. Since, therefore, my reverend fathers and brethren have obliged me to attempt a service, for which I am so poorly qualified; permit me to represent some of the qualifications necessary in the spiritual instructor. The subject must greatly suffer by the unskilful hand that manages it: and yet I would hope, that my weak endeavours may, by the divine blessing, stir up our remembrance of truths, too obvious indeed to be unknown, but which even the best and wisest among us, are sometimes apt to forget, when a practice corresponding to them becomes our duty.

The principal qualifications necessary in the spiritual instructor, are, personal religion; soundness in the faith; a good genius, improved by a competent measure of true learning; prudence and discretion; and a due mixture of a studious disposition, and of an active spirit.

I. *Personal religion* is a necessary qualification in the christian teacher. God has not, indeed, limited the efficacy of ordinances by the character of the dispenser. But yet the scriptures warrant us to say, that wicked ministers run unsent, and that God generally frowns upon, and blasts their labours ^b. When souls are entrusted to the slaves of Satan, we cannot but dread a bad account of them: For what concern will those feel, or what care will they take, about the salvation of others, who feel no concern for their own salvation?

^b Psal. l. 16.; and Jer. xxiii. 21, 22, 23.

salvation? Ministers are men of God ^c; an expression which surely implies that they are men devoted to his service, conformed to his blessed image, zealous for his honour, animated by his spirit, and breathing after communion and fellowship with him. But a man of God, living without God in the world! a man of God, whose affections are earthly, sensual, and devilish! a master of Israel, ignorant of the new birth ^d! a guide to Zion, walking in the paths that lead to destruction! a soldier of Christ, in league with Satan! is a shocking and monstrous absurdity. The light of the world, and the salt of the earth, are too honourable titles for any under the power of darkness and corruption. Those must be clean, that bear the vessels of the sanctuary. Their master is holy, their work is holy; and therefore it becomes them to be holy also. An infinitely wise God would scarcely appoint those to help forward others to Christ, who themselves are strangers to him; or commission those as his ambassadors, to negotiate a treaty of peace with an apostate rebel world, who themselves are obstinately persisting in treachery and rebellion.

If a bad man desires to be a minister, his ends of desiring it are low, sordid, and mercenary: not to win souls to Christ, but to gain a comfortable subsistence to himself and his family: not to secure the substantial honour of the divine approbation, but to attract the empty applause of the great, or of the populace. Hence, if speaking the truth interferes with his interest or reputation, he had rather risk the salvation of his hearers, than hazard the displeasure of those who can do him a favour. Having no heart to his work, he is glad to shift it off, or to perform it in a

B 2

lazy,

^c 1 Tim. vi. 11.

^d John iii. 10.

lazy, careless, unprofitable manner; and yet he cannot wholly avoid the unpleasant drudgery of recommending to others what he dislikes himself, of counterfeiting sentiments he never felt, and of applauding a behaviour the very reverse of his own. He seeks not the grace of God, to assist him in his labours, and to crown them with success. No wonder, then, that he does no good to souls, since he does not so much as aim at doing it.

How different is the case with those who are fitted to preach the gospel to others, by having felt the power of it on their own hearts!

They engage in the work of the ministry, not seeking their own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved ^e. They take the oversight of the flock, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind ^f. With eyes divinely enlightened, they contemplate the fervent love to God, the tender compassion to perishing souls, and the infinite hatred of sin, which shine so brightly in the example of Jesus, and thus suck in something of these glorious dispositions. Beholding, with devout admiration, what Christ has done and suffered, to seek and to save that which was lost, they esteem it their highest honour and happiness to contribute, even in the lowest degree, to promote that generous design, though at the expence of every thing that unrenewed nature accounts valuable. Their inquiry is not, how shall I indulge my sloth, raise my fortune, or advance my reputation? But, how shall I glorify God, advance the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, and promote the spiritual and eternal welfare of precious and immortal souls? Having tasted that the Lord is gracious, they are unwilling to eat their spiritual morsels

^e 1 Cor. x. 33.

^f 1 Pet. v. 2.

fels alone, and earnestly wish to have others partakers of the same grace of life, and, in this respect, not only almost, but altogether, such as they are ^s. Having known the terrors of the Lord ^h, they feel a tender compassion for those who have no pity for themselves. Their souls weep for them in secret places, and are grieved at the hardness of their hearts; yea, they travail in birth for them, till Christ be formed in them, and long to impart to them some spiritual gift, by which they may be edified ⁱ. I might add, they love all with a pure heart fervently, who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity; and, forgetting little differences of opinion in matters of doubtful disputation, they esteem their persons, value their society, sympathize with them in their distresses, rejoice in their temporal and spiritual prosperity, and, being affectionately desirous of them, are willing to impart to them, not the gospel only, but their own souls also: so dear and precious are such in their eyes ^k!

Animated by such a spirit, the pious minister is *vigorous and active, diligent and unwearied*, in his Master's service. Night and day, his care and vigilance resemble that of the most tender-hearted affectionate parent. Careful to find out the necessities of his flock, and the most proper methods to supply them, and, having found out these methods, careful and speedy in applying them. When carnal men cry, Master, spare thyself; or when the remains of a sluggish and indolent spirit would pull him back, he remembers the dreadful doom of those who hide their talents in a napkin ^l, or do the work of the Lord deceitful-

B 3

ly.

^s Acts xxvi. 29. ^h 2 Cor. v. 11. ⁱ Gal. iv. 19.; and Rom. i. 11.

^k 1 Thess. ii. 8. ^l Matth. xxv. 24—30.; and Luke xix. 20—27.

ly ^m. The whole of his time and strength, he thinks too little to spend, in endeavouring to save, even one soul, from death. Hence, he stirs up the gift of God that is in him; exerts himself with an unlanguishing vigour; and whatsoever his hand findeth to do, doeth it with all his might. He knows the worth of time too well, to trifle it away in vain amusements, in idle visits, in unprofitable studies, or needlessly to immerse himself in secular business, in political schemes, or any thing else foreign to his office. Impatient of whatever would divert him from his work, or retard him in it, he counts those hours lost, in which he is not either getting good to his own soul, doing good to the souls of others, or acquiring greater fitness for his important trust. For the same reason, he keeps as abstracted as possible from the world, lest, by engaging too far in its tumultuous cares, a worldly spirit, kindling in his breast, should gradually consume every devout and benevolent affection. Such a one was the great Apostle of the Gentiles. Hear from himself what were his services: “In labours more abundant, in journeyings often, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides these things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches ⁿ.” Love to Christ set in motion all his springs of action, and made him fly like a flaming seraph, from pole to pole, to proclaim the ineffable glories of the Son of God, and to offer his inestimable benefits to the sons of men ^o.

Grace,

^m Jer. xlviii. 10. ⁿ 2 Cor. xi. 26—28.

^o Much of this apostolic spirit appeared in some of the first reformers, and has in our own time appeared in the painful and successful

Grace, in lively exercise, makes the teacher *honest and impartial, bold and courageous*. These qualifications he will often have occasion for in the discharge of his duty. If he strikes at errors or superstitions, which antiquity has rendered sacred and venerable, many will count him an enemy to God and religion, for telling them the unwelcome truth^p, and stamp upon him the most opprobrious names, for paying more regard to the infallible word of God, than to the absurd unscriptural traditions of men. If he urges men to costly and self-denying duties, the covetous and the proud are disobliged. If he reproves particular vices, those notoriously guilty of them are offended. Or if he inflicts church censures on the openly scandalous and immoral, not only the guilty person, but his friends and relations, take umbrage at it. But none of these things move him^q. He will not, through a slavish dread of man, put his candle under a bushel^r, or withhold the truth in unrighteousness^s: but endeavours to keep back from his hearers nothing profitable, however unpleasant and distasteful, and to declare to every one of them the whole counsel of God^t. He reckons himself a debtor to the wise, and to the unwise^u, to the bond and to the free, to young and old, to rich and poor, to friends and to enemies, to the meek and to the froward, to those who have, and to

B 4

those

ful labours of the late Mr *David Brainerd*, in the conversion of barbarous *Indians* to the Christian faith. See his *Journal*, printed at *Philadelphia*, 1746, and Mr *Edwards's Account of his Life*, printed at *Boston*, 1749. It is pity the *London* abridgement of his *Journal* has omitted a curious account of the difficulties he met with in christianizing the *Indians*, and the methods he used to surmount these difficulties.

^p Gal. iv. 16.^q Acts xx. 24.^r Matth. v. 15.^s Rom. i. 18.^t Acts xx. 20, 27.^u Rom i. 14.

those who have not, profited by his ministry. Hence, his labours extend to all his people without exception; not, indeed, in the same measure and degree, but in proportion to their necessities, and the probability of success. He is no respecter of persons, but warns every man, and teaches every man, in all wisdom, that he may present every man perfect in Christ ^v. The soul of the meanest is precious in his sight. He enters the cottages of the poor, as willingly, as the palaces of the wealthy; and can esteem holiness, though dressed in rags, or lying on a dunghill. Nor is he biassed by the hopes of their favour, to cringe and fawn to the great. He scorns to humour their vices, or flatter their weaknesses. If they dare sin, he dares reprove, however his worldly interests may suffer by it. He uses not flattering words, nor a cloak of covetousness ^w. Artifice and dissimulation he abhors, and will not decline his duty, from the fear of exposing himself to hatred or reproach. Though briars and thorns be with him, and he dwells among scorpions, he is not afraid of their words, nor dismayed at their looks ^x, but speaks plain and home to the conscience, leaving the event to his great Master. Thus Christ preached to the Pharisees, against covetousness, hypocrisy, and making void God's law by human traditions. Paul reasoned with Felix of temperance and righteousness. Peter charges his hearers with murdering the Lord of glory. And John the Baptist tells Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother Philip's wife."—The faithful minister deems himself bound to go and do likewise, and will rather offend man by this boldness, than offend God, by conniving at sin.

While

^v Col. i. 28.

^w 1 Thess. ii. 5.

^x Ezek. ii. 6.

While others walk in craftiness, and handle the word of God deceitfully, meanly disguise and dissemble their sentiments, subscribe as true what they are convinced is false, suit their doctrine to the depraved taste of their hearers, or express themselves in so ambiguous a manner, that they appear to maintain, what inwardly they disbelieve: he renounces these hidden things of dishonesty, and by manifestation of the truth commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God ^y. He is bold, in his God, to preach the gospel, not as pleasing men, but God who trieth the heart ^z. The truths of God, whether fashionable, or not, he will declare, knowing, if he should please man by concealing them, he should not be the servant of Christ ^a. Though errors have long maintained their ground, and are still keenly espoused, not only by great, but even by good men, he opposes them with a zeal and warmth suited to their importance. Like Paul, who would not give place by subjection to the Judaizing teachers, no, not for an hour; and who even withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed ^b. God's word is in his heart as a burning fire, shut up in his bones ^c; and therefore, cost what it will, he cannot but speak the things which he has seen and heard ^d. His belly is as wine that hath no vent, and necessity is laid upon him to speak, that he may be refreshed ^e. He would rather be right in his opinions, than be thought so. He will not sacrifice the truth, for the reputation of holding it; nor purchase honour, at the expence of honesty. With sacred sincerity, what the Lord saith, that will he speak; though philosophers should call him Enthusiast,

^y 2 Cor. iv. 2. ^z 1 Theff. ii. 2, 4. ^a Gal. i. 10. ^b Gal. ii. 5, 11.
^c Jer. xx. 9. ^d Acts iv. 20. ^e Job. xxxii. 18, 20.

fiast, the populace salute him Heretic, or the statesman pronounce him mad.

This integrity and uprightness preserves the minister from fainting under a prospect of outward difficulties, and a sense of his own weakness. Having put his hand to the plough, he will not draw back ^f. Though he has long laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought, he will not give over labouring, but says in his heart, it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house ^g. When he considers what men are before their conversion, he sees no cause to despair of the repentance of any, however hardened in wickedness. He cannot think it much to wait on his fellow-sinners, and bear with their reproaches, and injuries, and ingratitude, when he reflects, with what patience and long-suffering the great God has waited upon him. Taught by the divine condescension, he is gentle among his people, even as a nurse that cherisheth her children; and though he might be bold, in Christ, to enjoin them that which is convenient, yet, for love's sake, he rather beseeches them ^h. And while he cannot but observe much in their behaviour, to damp and discourage him, yet he is willing to see and own any thing in it that is good and commendable, and is prompted by the least favourable appearances, to undertake services the most painful and difficult.

Grace, in lively exercise, not only animates the teacher to his work, but *assists him in it, and greatly tends to crown it with success*. It does so, by disposing him to *give himself to prayer*, as well as to the ministry of the word. Sensible that all his furniture for the ministry,

^f Luke ix. 62.

^g Ezek. xii, 3.

^h 1 Thess. ii, 7. and Philem, 8, 9.

ministry, and success in it, must come from the Lord, with humble fervour and confidence he implores the divine blessing. Yea, he wrestles and makes supplication, and, as a prince, has power with God; and prevails. He is a favourite at the court of heaven, and improves all his interest there for his people's good. His heart's desire and prayer to God, for every one of them is, that he may be saved ⁱ; and the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. It opens the windows of heaven, and brings down a blessing, till there is no room to receive. Hence, plentiful out-pourings of the Spirit have been often obtained by the prayers of some of our pious ancestors, whose gifts and learning were far from being considerable ^k.

Further—*Personal religion promotes knowledge of the truth, and aptness to teach*; both which are indispensably necessary in the spiritual instructor. A sincere devotedness to Christ, and a sense of the infinite importance of religion, excite him diligently and impartially to inquire what are the genuine doctrines and precepts of Christianity. Hence, with a mind open to conviction, unbiassed by prejudice or prepossession, and ready to embrace the truth as soon as sufficient evidence of it shall appear to him, he candidly hears all parties, and cheerfully receives religious instruction, whoever is the instrument of conveying it. At the same time, as it is the faith once delivered to the saints, not the established tenets of a party, which he would discover and embrace; he will not blindly follow any human guide, but brings every doctrine to the test of the sacred oracles, and makes these, not the

ⁱ Rom. x. 1.

^k See Fulfilling of the Scriptures, folio edition, page 197.

the systems of fallible men, the standards of his faith. He seeks for Christianity in the scriptures, by reading them with devout attention, meditating on them day and night, and imploring the illuminations of their divine Inspirer, to teach him God's ways, and lead him into all truth.

Nor can such petitions fail to receive a gracious answer. For God has promised, if any man will do his will, that he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God¹; which implies, that men who have this spirit, shall be preserved from fundamental errors. They have an unction from the holy One, whereby they know all things^m. There is a taste in painting and music, which enables some, with great exactness, to perceive the beauties or blemishes of a picture or musical composition. One, whose palate is not vitiated, knows good food as soon as he tastes it. Good-nature points out, at once, to the benevolent, what is agreeable or disagreeable to the rules of goodness, far more precisely, than the brightest genius does to the sullen and morose. Just so, a holy soul, when in the lively exercise of grace, without the trouble of surveying principles and consequences, easily distinguishes between good and evil; and, by an immediate perception of the beauty or ugliness, sweetness or nauseousness, of such or such actions, judges of itself what is right: for love to God, heavenly-mindedness, meekness, humility, and such like graces, discover more readily and exactly to one of ordinary capacity, what conduct is becoming or unbecoming in a Christian, than the most diligent study and elaborate reasoning discovers this to a man who has not a spiritual taste, though of the strongest natural abilities.

The

¹ John vii. 17.

^m 1 John ii. 20.

The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: for the heart of the righteous teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips ^a. Those who are holy, being transformed by the renewing of their mind, prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God ^o. The pleasant harmony there is between the word of God, and the disposition and relish of the sanctified, brings suitable scripture rules to their remembrance on proper occasions, and mightily helps them in judging the true meaning of these rules.

And, as piety thus prevents men from mistaking the duties, so it preserves them from prejudices against the doctrines of Christianity. The natural man, who has nothing in him but mere unrenewed nature, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned ^p. There is a certain glory and excellency in the gospel scheme of salvation, of which he has no more idea than a blind man of colours, or a deaf man of sounds. No wonder, then, that Christ crucified is to him a stumbling-block, and that, being led aside by the error of the wicked, he makes shipwreck of faith. But the faint, perceiving that so glorious a scheme as the gospel could have none but God for its author, is fortified by this consideration against the impressions which the subtle reasonings of Infidels might otherwise make upon him. Just as one, who perceives the light and brightness of the sun, would be little moved by any attempts to prove that there was nothing but darkness around him.

But, above all, inward piety assists in understanding and explaining experimental religion. These can best unveil the pangs of the new birth, and the nature
of

^a Prov. x. 32. and xvi. 23. ^o Rom. xii. 2. ^p 1 Cor. ii. 14.

of union and communion with Christ, and describe conversion, progressive sanctification, a life of faith, the struggles of the flesh and spirit, and such like subjects, who can speak of them from their own experience. Those are best suited to speak a word in season to weary souls, who can comfort them, in their spiritual distresses, with those consolations wherewith they themselves have been comforted of God ⁹. Their experience of the influence of truths which have been most useful to their own souls, leads them to insist much upon these in their public ministrations, and determines them to know nothing in comparison of Christ, and him crucified. Whereas, on the other hand, some of the most edifying subjects are least relished by a bad man, and can scarcely be managed by him with any advantage. Will he be fit to warn his hearers of the devices of Satan, and the deceits of a desperately wicked heart, who, being quite a stranger at home, knows nothing of these matters but from uncertain report? will not the unconverted minister, when he meets with the discouragements of an awakened sinner, or the fears and distresses of a doubting deserted saint, be often at a loss how to deal with them? and is there not the highest danger, lest, on the one hand, he build up the false hopes of the self-deceiver, or, on the other hand, make sad the hearts of those whom God would not make sad? Surely, those who are animated by the Spirit, which inspired the scriptures, bid fairest for explaining them aright, and applying them to the various necessities of their hearers.

Ministers unconcerned about religion, are generally *cold and languid in their addresses to the conscience.* When

⁹ 2 Cor. i. 4.

When urging others to repent and believe, they do but stammer about these things ; and their words, not coming from the heart, are not likely to reach it. Even, when the doctrine they preach tends to rouse the secure, their way of preaching it tends to lull them asleep^r. There is something unnatural in endeavouring to excite, in other mens breasts, motions we never felt in our own. No wonder, then, that men behave awkwardly in attempting it, and that the coldness of the preacher makes the hearers cold too. But, when the faithful minister exhorts ; out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And the language of the heart has something in it peculiarly lively and persuasive, something of unction, not to be equalled by the most laboured compositions of others. Unless one's gifts are uncommonly mean, a warm concern for souls will animate and inflame his language, dictate to him the most moving and pathetic addresses, and, on some occasions at least, inspire him with a divine, and, almost, irresistible eloquence, which, with amazing force, will pierce the conscience, ravish the affections, and strike conviction into the most obdurate offender.

True religion will *promote* in ministers *a pious and exemplary behaviour*. The best advices lose their weight, when the adviser gives us ground to suspect his sincerity, and to taunt him with the proverb, Physician, cure thyself. Though ministers are not grossly profligate, if they are more solicitous to promote their own

^r Pride, says Mr Baxter, makes many a man's sermons ; and what pride makes, the Devil makes. And what sermons the Devil will make, and to what end, we may easily conjecture. Though the matter be of God, yet if the dress, and manner, and end, be from Satan, we have no great reason to expect success. *Baxter's Gildas Salvianus*, Chap. 4. Sect. 2.

own ease, wealth, and grandeur, than to advance the glory of God, and the good of souls; more diligent to improve their farms, than to feed their flock; lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God; and more happy in the company of the libertine, than of the serious Christian; if their behaviour is light and airy, and their conversation frothy and trifling; if they are always on the popular, or always on the fashionable side, and implicitly follow the directions of those who have it in their power to gratify their pride, or satiate their avarice: this will greatly lessen our respect for their instructions. But if ministers, by their conversation, as well as by their doctrine, hold forth the word of life; if they live what they preach, possess the graces they recommend, and practise the virtues they enforce on others; if they are courteous and affable, kind and condescending, and, while they dare to plead the cause of the God of truth, do it in a manner which may not offend him as the God of love; if they can hate a man's vices, and yet love his person, and esteem his excellencies, without approving his faults; if they keep at the widest distance from a sullen moroseness and melancholy dejection, and yet are grave and decent out of the pulpit as well as in it, maintain the dignity of their character, avoid those liberties, which, though generally deemed innocent, have been guilty of destroying both the power and form of godliness, and abridge themselves, on proper occasions, even of lawful freedoms, remembering, that many things may be lawful, which, when practised by a minister, edify not; if they are indeed blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, shining as lights in the world; if, under the strongest temptations to dissemble, the law of truth is in their mouth, and

no

no iniquity found in their lips ; if their private behaviour breathes a spirit of genuine undissembled goodness : what a glorious prospect does this open, of the flourishing of religion under their culture ? If all in the ministry did thus walk with God in truth and equity, might we not expect God would honour them, to turn many away from iniquity^f ? might we not hope, that so lovely a conduct would engage others to be followers of them, even as they are of Christ ?—Exemplary holiness, meekness and gentleness, forbearance and patience, candour and moderation, modesty and humility, love to God, to Christ, and to virtue, and a behaviour corresponding to these graces, must needs adorn the teacher's profession, add efficacy to his instructions, stop the mouth of slander, give freedom and boldness in reproving vice, gain him the affections of the pious, command the esteem and reverence of the indifferent, strike the enemies of religion with awe and dread, restrain the most profligate from many enormities they would otherwise commit, and transform even envy itself into admiration of so amiable a character, and a generous desire to copy after it.—But, may some inquire, cannot the hypocrite behave well ? I grant he may, in a certain degree. But some of the most signal and illustrious evidences of grace in the heart, are of so mortifying a nature, that the hypocrite will scarcely attempt to counterfeit them : or, if he do, as the part he acts is unnatural and constrained, it is scarce possible, but, when off his guard, something will be done or neglected by him, which, though no full evidence of the badness of his heart, may raise such prejudices against him, as will render his person contemptible, and his ministry too. Not

C

to

^f Mal. ii. 6.

to observe that a holy providence often unveils the secret depravity, which a splendid profession may, for a while, conceal.

I conclude this head, with observing, that if the seeds of godliness are not sown in the heart, ere we undertake the pastoral office, probably, they will never be sown there. True, indeed, a bad minister is not out of the reach of grace: but, of all men, he has least reason to expect it. His being engaged in religious services, so far from promoting his cure, tends to harden him in impenitence. And as wicked seamen, who continually border on the confines of death, by being accustomed to danger, learn to despise it; so the most affecting truths, by being familiar to the wicked preacher, lose their efficacy upon him, and he acquires such a habit of talking of things the most important and tremendous, without feeling what he says, that neither the thunders of the law alarm, nor the grace of the gospel allures him. To use the words of the judicious Bishop Butler, “ Going over the theory of virtue in one’s thoughts, “ talking well, and drawing fine pictures of it; this “ is so far from necessarily or certainly conducing to “ form an habit of it, in him who thus employs him- “ self, that it may harden the mind in a contrary “ course, and, by degrees, render it insensible to all “ moral considerations. For, from our very faculty “ of habits, passive impressions, by being repeated, “ grow weaker. Thoughts, by often passing through “ the mind, are felt less sensibly.”

II. *Orthodoxy, or, soundness in the faith*, is highly necessary in a spiritual instructor. Much more stress is laid upon this, in the sacred writings, than some
seem

* Butler’s Analogy, P. 1. Chap. 5.

seem willing to allow. Timothy is not only instructed what to preach, but commanded to charge some, that they teach no other doctrine; to withdraw himself from those who teach otherwise, and who consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; to avoid those oppositions of science, falsely so called, which some professing, have erred concerning the faith; and to hold fast the form of sound words which he had heard of Paul ^u. Titus is acquainted, that a bishop must hold fast the faithful word, as he has been taught, and charged to speak the things which become sound doctrine; in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned ^v. But can all this be expected of one whose sentiments are unsound? or shall we say, these qualifications were necessary in an age when the presence of the apostles might have done much to stop the progress of error, but are unnecessary now? Jude acquaints those to whom he wrote, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints ^w." Does not this import, that the common salvation cannot be secured, if fundamental articles of faith are renounced?

I know orthodoxy is a thing every where spoken against, and has had the misfortune to be judged and condemned as accessory to crimes, which, had men consulted it, they would never have committed. If the name displeases any, we shall give it another. Is

C 2

it

^u 1 Tim. i. 3. vi. 3, 5, 20, 21. 2 Tim. i. 13.

^v Tit. i. 9. ii. 1, 7, 8.

^w Jude 3.

it either ridiculous or hurtful, to judge of things as they really are? If orthodoxy, in this sense, has done evil, let its enemies bear witness of the evil; but if good, why do they reproach it? Do superstition, enthusiasm, bigotry, or persecution, for conscience sake, flow from just sentiments of religion, and of the proper means to promote it? or rather, do they not flow from wrong sentiments of these? Truth and general utility necessarily coincide. The first produces the second. "Observing truth, *to use the words of the learned Bishop Warburton*, is acting as things really are. He who acts as things really are, must gain his end, all disappointment proceeding from acting as things are not; just as in reasoning from true or false principles, the conclusion that follows must be necessarily right or wrong. But, gaining the end of acting, is utility or happiness; disappointment of the end, misery^x." If, then, as this masterly reasoner has well proved, truth produces utility; will it not follow, that to despise orthodoxy, is to despise happiness? I would add, that, as the end of divine revelation is the glory of God, and the holiness and happiness of mankind, it is, on the matter, impeaching divine wisdom, to say, that there is any thing in divine revelation, which does not tend, in some degree, directly or indirectly, to promote these ends. And, if so, even lesser mistakes in public teachers must be hurtful, as even lesser mistakes will prevent their improving certain truths for the good and wise purposes for which they were revealed. Nevertheless, though a teacher free from error may be wished for, it can scarcely be expected, that, in the present state of human nature, such a one should be found: for, as
the

^x Warburton's Divine Legation, Book 3. Sect. 6.

the apostle observes in the verse following our text, “ If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.” Those, therefore, who entertain just notions of those doctrines which the holy Spirit uses as the chief means of convincing and converting sinners, and building up saints in faith, holiness, and comfort, may, notwithstanding their lesser mistakes, be considerably useful in preaching the gospel. But such as have wrong notions of those truths whereby the blessed Spirit ordinarily begins and carries on the life of God in the soul of man, are scarcely fit to be *workers together with God* ^y, in the affair of man’s salvation. And those will be likely to corrupt men from the simplicity that is in Christ, and remove them to another gospel, who embrace principles which strike at the vitals, and sap the very foundations of religion; principles calculated to flatter the pride, or to encourage the sensuality of corrupt nature.

Allow me to adopt the reasonings of a sermon lately printed, in which the importance of right principles in religion is excellently represented ^z. “ They who hold the good influence of Christian principles to be so inconsiderable, as to render the propagation of them of no great importance, will be at no loss to give us instances of corrupt and wrong principles having had a great influence on the world. Loud complaints we hear from this quarter, of the dreadful effects which superstition and enthusiasm have produced; how they have poisoned the tempers and transformed the manners of men, and have overcome the strongest restraints of law, of reason, and of humanity.—Is this, then, the case, that all

C 3

“ principles,

^y 2 Cor. vi. 1.

^z Dr Blair’s sermon before the Society for propagating Christian knowledge, Jan. 1. 1750, p. 17.

“ principles, except good ones, are supposed to be
 “ of such mighty energy? Strange! that false religion
 “ should do so much, and true religion so little. No
 “ impartial inquirer, sure, can be of so absurd an
 “ opinion. The whole history of mankind shews,
 “ that religious belief is no inconsiderable principle
 “ of action. The mischief such belief has done, when
 “ misled, is indeed a good argument to be on our
 “ guard against error. But, as it is a proof of what
 “ belief can do, it is an argument to hope the more
 “ from it, when rightly directed.” These reflections
 prove not only the importance of Christianity in general,
 but of just and true sentiments of the particular
 doctrines contained in it; and, consequently, they
 prove the importance of an orthodox ministry.

III. *A tolerable genius and capacity, with a competent measure of true learning*, are requisite to fit for the office of a spiritual instructor. Infidels may wish, as Julian the apostate did, to see learning banished from the Christian church. And men of low education, or of selfish spirits, may think meanly, or speak diminutively of a gospel ministry, as if the weakest abilities sufficed to qualify for it. But a Paul cried out, who is sufficient for these things ^a? Elihu tells us, that scarcely one of a thousand is qualified to deal with the conscience ^b. Jeroboam was blamed for making priests of the lowest of the people ^c. And Amos speaks of it, as something strange and unusual, that he who had not been educated in the schools of the prophets, who was no prophet, neither a prophet's son, but an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit, should be commissioned by God to prophesy to Israel ^d. However,

^a 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^b Job xxxiii. 23.

^c 1 Kings xii. 31.

^d Amos vii. 14, 15.

ever, then, some may speak evil of the things which they know not, we dare engage to prove, that a weak, honest man, might, with as much propriety, and as little inconvenience, be allowed to undertake the office of physician, or advocate, or judge, as the office of a minister of Christ: though, doubtless, his good and honest heart, without other qualifications, would be poor enough furniture for offices less important and difficult than these. Uncommon talents are necessary to explain obscure passages of Scripture, to resolve intricate cases of conscience, and to defend the truth against gainfayers; services, to which ministers have frequent calls. Nor will a small measure of skill and ability qualify any man, to teach the necessary doctrines and duties of religion, to convince the understanding, to interest the affections, to dart irresistible light into the conscience, and fix it there, to meet with mens objections and prejudices against religion, to unfold the tentations of Satan, and deceits of the heart, and to do all this in a manner becoming the dignity of the pulpit, and yet plain to the dullest capacity. Nothing less than this, is the ordinary object of the spiritual instructor. Good sense, expressed so perspicuously, and ranged in such an order, as to be easily understood and remembered, is the very soul of composition; and this cannot be expected, but from one of a quick invention, a clear head, and a sound judgement, who has gifts as well as grace, a doctrinal and speculative, as well as a practical and experimental knowledge, and has acquired a facility of imparting his ideas to others. And even all this will not go so far as to qualify a man to speak often in public, without either a retentive memory, or an unusual command of words. Nay, the best natural powers will
need

need to be well cultivated by a liberal education. Without an ability to read the scripture in the languages in which it was originally written, and some acquaintance with natural and moral philosophy, history, antiquity, the best Greek and Roman authors, and the arts of logic, rhetoric, and criticism, in an age of so much learning as the present, a minister can scarcely fail to be despised; and a despised ministry is seldom successful. Besides, on many occasions, the teacher will need all his learning to unfold to him the meaning of difficult passages in sacred writ, especially if, as sometimes happens, his commentaries fail him, where he most wants their help. Nor will one, wholly ignorant of philosophy, history, and criticism, be able to give satisfying answers to the reasonings of infidels founded upon these, to detect their sophistry, beat them out of their strong holds, and so, if he convince not their conscience, at least to stop their mouths. There are some scriptures, from which, if they stood in the original as they do in our translations, almost unanswerable objections might be drawn against our holy faith. And what advantage must this give the infidel to triumph over the illiterate teacher! And, indeed, if the hedge of a learned ministry were once removed from these lands, as I am afraid some wish it to be, what could we expect, but that ignorance and infidelity, error and heresy, superstition and enthusiasm, should quickly overspread them? Those who, by the blessing of God on their studies, have acquired considerable measures of learning, have been the best explainers and defenders of Christianity, and recommended practical religion in the most distinct and persuasive manner. And, without a miracle, which

which we have no ground to expect, illiterate ministers can never equal them.

But, above all, one who would teach others to be religious, must himself have *a clear and distinct notion of religion*. We cannot avoid despising the man, who is ignorant in his own profession, whatever his knowledge may be of other matters. To say of a physician, he has a good taste in music and poetry, but is grossly ignorant of the nature of diseases, and of their proper remedies, is giving him the most unfavourable character. In like manner, it is a wretchedly poor character of a minister of Christ, to say of him, "he is a good philosopher, and understands well the Greek and Roman writers, but is little acquainted with the means revealed in scripture, of recovering mankind from the ruins of their apostasy:" for, if so, he comes short of the very end of his office, and fails in that, in which, above all things, he ought to have excelled. We cannot therefore entertain too low and despicable an opinion of such ignorant presumers, as set up for teachers of Christianity, and pretend to shew unto others the way of salvation, while their own ideas of it are so dark and confused, that they have need to be taught which are the first principles of the oracles of God ^e. He who would be a scribe, instructed in the kingdom of heaven, able to bring forth out of his treasures things new and old ^f, must understand well the doctrine of man's primitive apostasy from God, with its unhappy effects on the whole human race; the method of recovery through Christ; the work of the Spirit in applying a purchased redemption; the full and free offers of Christ, and of salvation through him, made in the gospel,

^e Heb. v. 12.

^f Matth. xiii, 52.

pel, to the very chief of sinners; the nature of that faith which unites to Christ, of that holiness which makes men meet for the inheritance of saints in light, and which is indeed heaven begun in the soul; and of those various good works of piety, or of charity, by which we are bound to glorify God, to serve him in our generation, and to prove, to ourselves and others, the truth and energy of our faith. It is a contradiction to suppose, that ministers should be able to represent these important doctrines in a proper light to others, if they themselves understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm ^s. Miserable, therefore, must be the state of the church, if left to the care of such unskilful guides! for, if the blind lead the blind, both must fall into the ditch ^h. To prevent so dreadful a calamity, it is required, as an essential qualification of a guide to souls, that he be apt to teach; not a novice, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil ⁱ. Those, whose knowledge of divinity is entirely derived from a few modern sermon-writers, or books on the deistical controversy ^k, but who have never read and digested into their memories a system of divinity, must needs be ignorant of many important truths, and can scarcely have any view of that connexion of the different parts of religion, in which a great deal of its beauty consists. And will such keep back from their hearers nothing profitable ^l, and teach others what they have never learned themselves? will they instruct men in the whole

^s 1 Tim. i. 7. ^h Matth. xv. 14. ⁱ 1 Tim. iii. 2, 6.

^k The author regrets, that defences of Christianity, and replies to Tindal, Collins, &c. 47 years ago, when he preached this sermon, justly admired, and generally read, are now almost forgotten.

^l Acts xx. 20.

whole of their duty to God, to themselves, and to one another, who are unskilful in the word of righteousness ^l, having never studied with care the nature and necessity of these duties, the hinderances in the practice of them, and the methods of removing those hinderances? or will those, who have not thoroughly studied the evidences of Christianity in general, or of particular articles of faith, be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in them ^m; and thus be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince gainfayers ⁿ?

I conclude this head with observing, that the spiritual instructor should be *mighty in the scriptures* ^o, able not only to repeat, but to explain them, having the word of God dwelling in him richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is his duty to declare the whole counsel of God ^p, and to teach men to observe all things whatsoever Jesus has commanded ^q. But how can he do this, without knowing from the sacred oracles, what is the counsel of God, and what are the commands of Jesus? Any other guide will, in some instances, mislead, or at least prove defective, in his instructions. The scriptures only are fully sufficient for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction, for correction in righteousness; able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good word and work ^r; able to direct the minister, not only how to live, but how to preach. And he who is little conversant in them, will be apt to insist much on things which they rarely mention; and seldom to mention things on which they chiefly dwell: to lay a
great

^l Heb. v. 13.^m 1 Pet. iii. 15.ⁿ Titus i. 9.^o Acts xviii. 24.^p Acts xx. 27.^q Matth. xxviii. 20.^r 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

great deal of stress on things on which they lay little stress, and little stress on things which they exhibit as of the last importance. Hence, some discourses on self-examination almost entirely omit, or handle in an overly, superficial manner, some of the plainest, most express, and most frequently repeated, scripture characters of true holiness, on the one hand, and of counterfeit appearances of it, on the other, as if they had found out a better way to distinguish the real Christian from the self-deceiver, than that which the sacred oracles, when designedly treating this subject, have pointed out ^s. Hence, methods have been recommended to preserve the solemnity of ordinances, different from, nay, in some instances, contrary to, those which Infinite Wisdom has prescribed. Hence, some content themselves with recommending holiness in general, without distinctly explaining and enforcing particular duties, or reproving, as our Lord and his Apostles did, particular sins. Others, in exhorting to moral virtues, scarce make any use of the motives to them, urged with so divine an eloquence in the scriptures of truth ^t. And, which is worst of all, some

^s I know no writer who, in inquiring into this important subject, has proceeded with such cautious regard to the infallible touchstone of truth, as Mr Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, in his judicious treatise concerning religious affections, printed at Boston 1746. I scarcely think this age has produced any book on practical divinity, which will so well reward a careful perusal,

^t I mean not, *says a lively writer*, to exclude morality from preaching Christ. No; this I testify, that he, who neglects the former, shall never be benefited by the latter. Christ profiteth him nothing. *Religion is the soul's conformity to God in his moral perfections.* So much as a man has of true morality, so much has he of God; and so much as he has of God in this world, so much will he have of heaven in the next. But then, this

some so entirely omit the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, that one might hear a long course of sermons from them, without learning that, which it was the grand design of revelation to teach, the way, I mean, in which a fallen creature may emerge from the ruins of his apostasy. Hence, instead of rightly dividing the word of truth ^u, many confine their sermons to those subjects, on which they find their thoughts flow with most readiness and affection, neglecting others of at least equal importance. Some are continually detecting the deceits of the heart, and false resemblances of grace; others, thundering out the terrors of the law, representing the dreadful indignation of God against the unconverted, or arguing the justice of that indignation; and others content themselves, with inviting sinners to accept the Saviour, without taking suitable pains, by preaching the duties and sanctions of the law, to convince them of their need of him. Some seem to forget, that to quicken, to warn, to direct, and to encourage true Christians, is any part of their work;

this morality must be baptized in the name of Christ. Without regard to Christ in principle, and in end, and an entire dependence upon the influences of his spirit; the brightest speculations, and the strongest arguments, a text fetched from the bible, and motives brought from heaven, would be to preach Seneca, rather than Christ: and to urge the duties of morality upon motives that are not Christian, is only to deprive the lame man of his crutches, and then bid him walk. No man ever insisted on morality more than St Paul; but he ever christianiseth it: he ingrafts the man into faith by Christ, and you quickly find him budding with every precious grace, and loaded with the fruit of good works. Never doth Paul seem so much in his element, as when he is preaching Christ. How often doth he go out of his way to meet with him! Here, he stretches in his thoughts, and pursues the glories of the Redeemer, till he is almost out of breath, &c. *Hobby's Sermon at Emerson's ordination*, p. 16.

work ; while others address their audiences, as if they were all converted. Some preach continually upon duties, others upon privileges, others upon doubts and temptations. These, and such like defects, would be prevented, were Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, considered as our patterns in preaching. The deep things of God, which he has revealed by his Spirit, should be the grand topics of our ministry, as they were of Paul's : and these we should speak, as he did, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual v.

IV. Ministers have need to be persons of *prudence and conduct*, and to know men as well as books. A minister should *study himself*. He should not only be acquainted with his own spiritual state, but with the particular turn of his genius : for, God having distributed among ministers various gifts, and thereby fitted them to answer different purposes in his service, our usefulness will in a great measure depend upon knowing what our gift is. Thus, some are fittest to inform and convince the judgement, by the clear and distinct light in which they represent truth, and the strong and unanswerable arguments with which they support it. Others have a greater talent of touching the conscience, or of moving the passions. A minister should *study the make and frame of the human mind* ; for, till the springs of human nature are, in a good measure, disclosed to him, and he has learned how far the bodily passions, or a disordered imagination, may either cloud genuine piety, or cause a resemblance of it ; he will be often at a loss what judgment to frame of religious appearances. He should know all the a-

venues

venues to the soul, and study the different capacities and tempers of men, that he may be able, with becoming address, to suit himself to them all. Physicians consider the age, constitution, strength, and way of living, of their patients, and vary their prescriptions accordingly. Ministers should, in like manner, be able to adapt themselves to the different ages, natural dispositions, genius, temporal circumstances, temptations, errors, moral characters, and religious inclinations of their hearers.

No wise prince will employ those to manage affairs, in which his honour and the interest of his kingdom are deeply concerned, who have not capacities and accomplishments, in some measure adapted to that important trust; and, as Solomon observes, he that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool, cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage ^w. Can we, then, entertain so low sentiments of the wisdom of the King of heaven, as to think, that now, when extraordinary gifts are ceased, he would ordinarily employ those in the grand, but difficult design, of advancing his glory, and saving precious souls, who are unfit to be employed even about the common affairs of this life?

The embassadors of Jesus, then, should be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves ^x. The *wisdom* that is from above, which first is pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and of good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy, *should shine even in their private conversation*. They are required to let no man despise them ^y, and to give no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed ^z. A wicked, ill-natured world, are continually

^w Prov. xxvi. 6.

^x Matth. x. 16.

^y Tit. ii. 15.

^z 2 Cor. vi. 3.

ally watching for their halting, and will gladly improve the least slip or inadvertency, to bring a slur upon them. Ministers, therefore, had need to shun, not only what is sinful, but what is dishonourable or disobliging, and to avoid every thing which may justly blast their reputation, and thus lessen their influence, and impair their usefulness. If their behaviour is mean and sordid, ridiculous and affected, rash and imprudent, much hurt is hereby done to religion, and sacred things become contemptible.

They should not indulge the first sallies of a warm imagination, but weigh the more distant consequences of actions, lest they mislead the weak and injudicious, provoke the censures of the captious and severe, and hurt the gospel when they meant to serve it. Where they innocently may, they should accommodate themselves to peoples humours, and become all things to all men, that, by an obliging conduct, they may gain them to Christ. They should avoid imprudently intermeddling in controversies of a civil nature, especially among those of their own charge, and saying or doing any thing indiscreet, whereby they may prejudice the people against their ministrations. In opposing error, and reproving vice, they must know when to keep silence, and when to speak ^a; when to come with a rod, and when in the spirit of meekness ^b. Likewise, in healing wounded consciences, in reconciling those at variance, in encouraging the disconsolate, in speaking to those on a deathbed, in managing the public business, and in exercising the discipline of the church; all their sagacity, caution, penetration and judgment, are little enough to choose out the proper-
est

^a Eccl. iii. 7.

^b 1 Cor. iv. 21.

est means, and to apply them with dexterity, that they may not spoil the best designs by bad management.

Spiritual instructors need *wisdom for rightly managing their public discourses*. They should adapt the choice of their subjects to the particular circumstances and necessities of their hearers, as wise householders, giving to every one his portion of meat in due season ^c; and should compose their sermons so, as that the meanest may understand, and the most judicious have no cause to despise them, and so as neither unnecessarily to offend the weak, nor give advantage to the maliciously criticising. They should imitate their glorious Master, who patiently bore with the prejudices of his disciples, and instructed them as they were able to bear it ^d. Much depends on the timing of things well, and the manner of doing them; on choosing the most proper seasons for instruction, and imparting it in an engaging manner; on avoiding offensive phrases, and borrowing favourite ones, where we honestly can; and, on using such reasonings to confirm the doctrines, or to enforce the duties of religion, as we have ground to think, from the disposition of our hearers, or the dealings of providence towards them, will be aptest to strike and work upon them: for a word, fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver ^e. Now, in all this, wisdom is profitable to direct ^f, as no rules can be given to extend to every particular case.

A due mixture of *a studious disposition*, and *of an active spirit*, is necessary in teachers of Christianity. That the last of these is so, appears, at first sight, from the time and pains requisite to know the state of our

D

congregations,

^c Luke xii. 42.

^d Mark iv. 33.

^e Prov. xxv. 11.

^f Eccl. x. 10.

congregations, to catechise, to visit the sick, to administer private instruction, reproof or consolation, to prepare young people for the Lord's table, and sometimes to conduct to the Saviour the awakened sinner, who is asking the way to Zion with his face set thitherward. The ministry is no idle or easy profession, but requires an almost uninterrupted series of the most painful and laborious services. But ministers, of a lazy, indolent disposition, will be tempted to hurry over those duties, and will grudge to spend so much time in them as is really necessary to render them in any degree useful. Nor will ordinary measures of grace suffice to overcome such temptations. But then, a studious disposition is equally necessary. It was not without its use, even in the days of inspiration. Solomon found much study a weariness to the flesh; but yet was sensible, that the advantages of it overbalanced the toil; and tells us, that the preacher, meaning himself, sought to find out acceptable words, and gave good heed, and sought out and set in order many proverbs. Though he excelled all men in understanding, yet he did not turn people off with any thing that came first in his mind, but took pains to range his thoughts in a proper method, and to express them in agreeable language; so that his sermons were the fruit of labour and study, as well as of inspiration. And he tells us what moved him to all this pains. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies"; *i. e.* There is like power in words wisely chosen to stir up the slothful to duty, as there is in a goad to prick the ox forward. Nor do they only move the affections in a transient way, but stick in the conscience and memory, as nails do in

a

* Eccl. xii. 9—12.

a board. Daniel understood, by books, the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem ^b. Paul was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and had made considerable proficiency under so eminent a master. And yet, after he had been favoured with divine inspiration, he is so far from thinking further study needless, that even when in prison, and when he had the near prospect of his approaching martyrdom, he commands his books and parchments to be sent him ⁱ. If this inspired apostle saw occasion for all the learning and knowledge he could attain to by ordinary means, to assist him in instructing mankind, much more must we stand in need of such helps, who cannot pretend to his extraordinary gifts. Paul exhorts Timothy to *give attendance, first to reading*, and then *to exhortation and doctrine*, to instruct himself well, before he instructed others; and charges him to meditate on divine things, and give himself wholly to them, that his profiting might appear to all ^k. Though, from a child, he had known the holy scriptures ^l, was esteemed learned enough to be a minister of Christ, and had extraordinary gifts bestowed upon him ^m; he is warned, that reading and meditation were still necessary to fit him to teach and exhort. Shall we then be able, without any reading or meditation at all, to preach the word of life, in a way suitable to its majesty and importance? I deny not, indeed, that those whom God has blessed with a ready elocution, may preach warmly and accurately too, without writing their sermons. But even those, who

D 2

have

^b Dan. ix. 2.ⁱ 2 Tim. iv. 6—13.; and Wolffii cur. crit.^k 1 Tim. iv. 13—15.^l 2 Tim. iii. 15.^m 1 Tim. iv. 14.

have words most at command, will prove but a sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal, if they do not endeavour, by reading and meditation, to be masters of the subjects on which they preach. Reverence for that God in whose name we speak, regard for the dignity of the pulpit, and concern for the glorious design that brings us there, should prevent our rushing into it rashly and unprepared, and serving God and his people with sudden undigested thoughts that cost us nothing ⁿ. Ministers are not set apart to their office, to trifle away six days of the week, and then to go to the pulpit with whatever comes uppermost. Such extemporary performances, though for a little they may please some, seldom do credit to God's ordinances, or produce any lasting effects on the hearers. The good matter contained in them is generally despised and overlooked, through contempt of the looseness of the method, and meanness of the style. Meditation, then, and reading, are necessary branches of a minister's duty; and, consequently, those must be unfit for the pastoral office, who are of an unfixed, fauntering disposition, who have no relish for study, know not what it is to meditate, and are never pleased but when with company, or abroad.

And now, *my dear hearers*, let what has been said affect *all of you*, with the deepest concern, that ever the care of souls should have been entrusted to men destitute of these qualifications. Let it excite in you the warmest emotions of gratitude to the Father of mercies, for blessing our land in general, and those bounds in particular, with so many able and faithful ministers. Let it procure your prayers for us in the
 ministry,

ministry, that the blessed Spirit would more and more qualify us for our difficult work, by imparting all needful supplies of gifts and grace : and that, as death is daily thinning our numbers, the Lord of the harvest would, from time to time, repair our breaches, by sending forth honest and skilful labourers into his harvest.

Students need scarcely be particularly addressed, as the whole of what has been said was principally designed to warn them, not to be too forward and hasty in setting up for teachers. God does not call those to feed the sheep of Christ, who have no love to the Shepherd °. For all who love not our Lord Jesus are wicked ; and unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do, to declare my statutes, or to take my covenant in thy mouth ? How great a trust is committed to the pastor ! Hundreds of precious immortal souls he is bound to watch over, as one that must give an account ¶ : And will you be able to give a good account of the souls of others, if unable to give a good account of your own ? Is it not a most pitiable case, to be under a strict and awful charge, to affect the minds of your hearers with what never affected your own minds ? Presume not, then, to undertake the care of souls, without personal holiness, and till, by the blessing of God on your education, and your diligent attendance on prayer, reading, and meditation, you have attained a suitable furniture of gifts and graces for the service of the sanctuary. You behold with indignation the quack-doctor, who will venture to hazard the health and lives of men for a little paltry gain. If such deserve to be accounted murderers of the body, shall not the blood of souls be laid to thy charge, if thou shalt undertake the care of them

D 3

while

° John xxi. 15—17.

¶ Psal. l. 16.

¶ Heb. xiii. 17.

while unqualified for it, and if, through thy negligence or unskilfulness, they shall eternally perish?

Parents should be well satisfied of the pious disposition of their children, and of the goodness of their genius, ere they devote them to the work of the ministry; and should beware of pressing them to undertake the care of souls, against their inclination, or without it.

Such as are invested with the power of choosing gospel ministers, or of choosing those who are to train up our youth in the various branches of knowledge necessary for the ministry, I would humbly intreat to be wise and faithful in the discharge of so important a trust. Let always the most worthy be preferred. Do all to the glory of God ^r. Esteem the interests of Zion, and of Zion's king, above your chiefest joy ^s. These are the commands of God; and, if you disregard them, sooner or later you shall smart for it. Let not affection for any friend, or fear of disobliging those, from whom you expect favours, mislead you to an improper choice.

Patrons, as good Bishop Burnet has observed ^t, are bound to pay a sacred regard to the trust vested in them; and if they exercise their legal right, should first carefully consider what are the qualifications of the person they present to a benefice; otherwise the souls, that may be lost by a bad nomination, will be required at their hands, by him who made and purchased these souls, and in whose sight they are of inestimable value. It is all one, with relation to the account they must give at the tribunal of Jesus, whether money, or kindred, or friendship, or something else,

^r 1 Cor. x. 31. ^s Psal. cxxxvii. 6.

^t Pastoral Care, ch. 7. p. 140, 141.; and ch. 10. throughout.

else, was their motive, in bestowing a presentation, if regard is not had, in the first place, to the worth of the person nominated, and his fitness to undertake the care of souls. Did patrons act with a visible regard to true goodness and real merit, and were they never swayed to make a wrong nomination by application and importunity, by ambitious or interested views, or by desire of gratifying a friend, who may have a chaplain to provide for; the worst grievance in presentations would be removed, which I take to be this, that many patrons have no sense of the value of souls; and therefore are indifferent with whom they intrust them.

Those, who are so happy as to be allowed the choice of a guide to their souls, must be chargeable with the worst of madness, nay, with the most monstrous and inexcusable impiety, if they willingly expose their souls to eternal destruction, by committing them to the charge of those, of whose piety and abilities they have no knowledge. Surely, no affair in the whole circle of life calls for more serious concern and importunate supplication. Let not then interest and favour, let not ambition to be head of a party, let not the solicitations of great men, on the one hand, or a humour of opposing them, on the other, determine your conduct. Be not too much influenced by little showy qualifications, such as a flowery style, a loud or melodious voice, a ready delivery. But covet earnestly the best gifts ^u, the most solid and substantial qualifications, such as piety, learning, sound principles, aptness to teach. Advise with faithful and judicious ministers, who are able and willing to serve your best interests, and are much more competent judges of

D 4

some

^u 1 Cor. xii. 31.

some of these qualifications, than private Christians ordinarily can be.

And let us, my *reverend and dear fathers and brethren*, from a genuine regard to the honour of God, and the credit of religion, to the success of the gospel, and the salvation of immortal souls; and as we would not bring a stain upon our order, and depreciate it in the eyes of the world, which is often partial enough to censure the whole clergy for the faults of a few: Let us beware of introducing any into the sacred office, but such as we have good evidence are qualified for it, by being visibly, and in the judgment of charity, sincere Christians, orthodox as well as learned, having grace as well as gifts. I acknowledge, designing men may counterfeit some of these qualifications, with so much artifice, as, after the utmost caution we can use, to impose upon us: and in that case, though we commit a mistake, we are guilty of no fault, since such favourable appearances ought to determine us to judge favourably. But if we separate any to the ministry, without suitable evidence of their fitness for it, either by personal acquaintance, and free unreserved conversation with them, or by hearing their public performances, and strictly and particularly examining their knowledge of the truth, and ability to defend it; or by private inquiries at those, on whose skill, integrity, opportunities of information, and cautiousness in recommending, we may safely rely: should such afterwards prove incapable of discharging their trust, the blame of their defects will be laid to our charge.

How awful is the warning of Paul to Timothy, and in him to all concerned in ordaining others to the pastoral office! *Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be*
partaker.

partaker of other mens sins : keep thyself pure *. As if he had said, though you have no particular reason to suspect a candidate unfit for the ministry, be not on that account slight and superficial in trying his qualifications for it, but examine, with the utmost care and exactness, his moral character, and aptness to teach ; for if, through indolence and carelessness, you neglect to make those inquiries, upon which you might have discovered what was amiss ; or if, through an excessive tenderness for candidates, through that fear of man which bringeth a snare, or through some other unworthy motive, you so far connive at his known vices or defects, as to grant him ordination ; by this conduct, you partake with him, not only in the sins he has already committed, but in those also which he shall afterwards commit, while he either teaches or lives badly ; and therefore, you must answer for all the pernicious consequences of his ordination, in ruining his own soul, and the souls of his flock. Nay, should other ministers be unwarrantably rash in this matter, and urge you to concur with them, be not moved by their entreaties or authority, to act contrary to your own judgment, lest you be condemned as accessary to their guilt. In the verse preceding this caution, ministers are charged *not to prefer one before another, and to do nothing by partiality*, i. e. not to determine a cause for or against any person, till we hear what can be said on both sides ; not to prefer one before another, where there appears no sufficient reason for such a preference ; and not to be swayed by friendship or prejudice, to be more favourable to one, and more severe to another, than we ought to be. And,

in

in the end of the chapter, to encourage this diligence, the apostle informs us, that, if we proceed with due deliberation, we shall not lose our labour, but shall ordinarily be able to form a right judgment concerning candidates. *Some mens sins are open beforehand, going before them to judgment; and some men, they, viz. their sins, follow after. Likewise, also, the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they, viz. the good works, that are otherwise, cannot be hid^w.* The meaning is, some mens sins are so heinous and notorious, that, going as it were before them to judgment, little or no trial is necessary in order to discover them. And the sins of others follow them to judgment; because, though less open, yet they also might, in most cases, by due inquiry, be brought to light. In like manner, the good works of some, and their fitness for ordination, are easily discerned, even before they undergo a formal trial; and those good works which are not manifest beforehand, but which, through the modesty or obscure situation of the performer, are little observed, may often, by a diligent search, be discovered.

From this remarkable passage, to which we would do well to take heed, the learned Grotius observes, that we ought not only to inquire, whether a candidate for ordination is innocent of atrocious crimes, but whether he has done much good, seeing the pious actions of the eminently pious can seldom be hid. And, agreeably to this, Paul requires, not only that a bishop be blameless, but that he have a good report of

^w 1 Tim. v. 24, 25. See Grotius or Wolffius on the place, and a piece, entitled, *The apostolical rule concerning the ordination of ministers considered.* Lond. 1737, p. 5—14.

of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach ^x; so that freedom from gross scandals, without certain positive evidences of a pious disposition, is no sufficient warrant for us to ordain any. It is criminal to lay hands on a candidate, if we have no positive ground to hope that he will preach usefully; and it is equally criminal to do it, if we have no positive ground to hope that he will be an example to others in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity ^y; for the last of these is as really a part of the minister's duty, and as really a means to be used by him for saving souls, as the first. The things, says Paul to Timothy, that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also ^z. We must have probable evidence of their faithfulness, as well as of their ability to teach. Even deacons are first to be proved, and then to use the office of a deacon ^a. Sure, then, ministers, whose office is much more honourable and important, should not be allowed to exercise it, till their fitness for it is well tried. But the vast danger of promiscuous admissions into the ministry, has been so well represented, in a pamphlet published here three years ago, on occasion of an act and overture of the General Assembly 1746 ^b, that I am sensible I have trespassed on your patience, in enlarging so much on this head.

If any allege, that there would not be found a sufficient

^x 1 Tim. iii. 2—7.

^y 1 Tim. iv. 12.

^z 2 Tim. ii. 2.

^a 1 Tim. iii. 10.

^b See a *Letter to a minister of the church of Scotland, shewing the unreasonableness of extending chap. 7. of the form of process to probationers.* Glasg. 1747, especially p. 6—27.; and p. 61—74.

ficient number of ministers for all our churches, did we ordain with such caution; I answer, it is better to hazard this inconvenience, than to break an express law of Christ, which, if less strict in ordaining, we certainly do. Let us mind our duty, and leave the event to providence. Strictness in admissions may, indeed, discourage those, who bid fairer for starving or poisoning, than for feeding the souls of their flocks. But to discourage such is highly commendable: and a small number of able and faithful pastors, is more to be desired than a multitude of raw, ignorant, illiterate novices, incapable either to explain or to defend the religion of Jesus; or of polite apostates from the gospel to philosophy, who think their time more usefully and agreeably spent in studying books of science, than in studying their bibles; or of mercenary hirelings, of as mean and fordid dispositions as those we read of 1 Sam. ii. 36, who crouched to the high-priest for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, saying, "Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."

May God, in mercy, prevent such low and unhappy men from ever creeping into the sacred function! May a faithful, an able, and a successful ministry, ever be the blessing of our land! May the glorious Head of the Church appoint unto every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and to all her assemblies, pastors according to his own heart, to feed his people with knowledge and understanding! And may he, whose words are works, say to our church in general, and to this corner of it in particular, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy

“ satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her
“ priests with righteousness, and her saints shall shout
“ aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of Da-
“ vid to bud. I have ordained a lamp for mine an-
“ ointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame;
“ but upon himself shall his crown flourish.”

DIS-

DISCOURSE II.

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL CAUTIONED AGAINST
GIVING OFFENCE.

Preached before the SYNOD of LOTHIAN and
TWEEDDALE,

At EDINBURGH, November 8. 1763.

2 CORINTHIANS, vi. 3.

GIVING NO OFFENCE IN ANY THING, THAT THE MINISTRY BE NOT
BLAMED.

THESE words of the apostle Paul, which were primarily intended to do justice to his own character, and that of Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, present to the view of gospel ministers, in every age, a fair and approved pattern, which they ought to copy after, if they wish to prosper in their arduous work. The conduct of these excellent men was, in the main, so circumspect and exemplary, that it could give no just cause of offence to Jews, to Gentiles, or to the churches of Christ. They carefully avoided whatever might increase the prejudices of unbelievers against the gospel, or might impair the reputation and success of their ministry, by laying a stumbling-block, or occasion of offence, in their brother's way.

I intend, in discoursing on this passage, first to explain the duty of giving no offence; then to inculcate upon myself and my brethren in the ministry, the practice

tice of that duty ; and, lastly, to conclude with some practical reflections on what may be delivered.

I. I am to explain the duty here recommended to ministers, *Giving no offence.*

To preach and to act so, as that, in fact, none shall be offended, would indeed be a hard, or rather impossible, task. We cannot govern the sentiments and passions of others ; and that can never be our duty, which is wholly out of our power. The tastes of our hearers are so opposite, that what is relished by one set of them will necessarily disgust another. So changeable are the humours of not a few, that what yesterday they approved, to-morrow they condemn. The weak and captious will censure our not doing what was either impossible or unfit to be done. Not visiting the sick when we were altogether ignorant of their sickness ; visiting one person oftener than another ; preaching a little longer than usual, or a little shorter ; insisting often on subjects of general importance, or insisting seldom on subjects of less extensive use ; repeating the same sermon in different pulpits ; borrowing useful observations from the compositions of others ; refusing to spend that time in company, which duty requires us to devote to our studies : nay, circumstances still more insignificant than these ; our parentage ; our wealth ; our poverty ; our dress ; our necessary recreations ; every thing that relates to us ; every thing we say or do, however innocent ; every thing we omit, however needless, may, by one or other, be found fault with. To such trifles, triflers alone can constantly attend. If people will take offence where no shadow of offence has been given, his soul must be groveling, and his time and pains poorly employed,

employed, who, in such low inconsiderable matters, can entirely guard against it. Even truth and holiness give offence. If any truth is contrary to generally received opinions, many will be our enemies for telling them that truth. If vice is honestly reprov'd, the obstinate transgressor will be provoked. But if men take umbrage at us for doing our duty, it becomes us to offend man rather than God. When we hold on steadily in the paths of truth and righteousness, amidst these unjust reproaches, the testimony of God and of a good conscience, will afford us unspeakable support and delight. The faithful minister, though reviled by an ungrateful generation, as a troubler of Israel, and a turner of the world upside down, is glorious in the eyes of the Lord. Though his character may, for a season, be under a cloud, God will at length bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day. It is evident, therefore, the duty of giving no offence, only means the giving no just cause of offence, by doing any thing unbecoming our profession as Christians, or our office as ministers of Christ. But it is proper to descend to particulars.

1. Our life and conversation should be inoffensive. Our station is elevated and conspicuous, and exposes us to the most strict and critical inspection. Many eyes are upon us, and the same allowances will not be made for our miscarriages as for those of others. Though we could speak with the tongues of men and angels, we shall hardly charm our hearers into a life of piety, and convince them that religion is beautiful, unless we exhibit her beauties in a regular well-ordered conversation. A dissolute life cannot fail to make us base in the sight of the people. When our practice

tice is manifestly inconsistent with our doctrines, the brightest parts will not protect our character, the finest accomplishments will not screen us from deserved reproach.

Nor is it enough, that we are not chargeable with scandalous wickedness. If we indulge ourselves in practices of a suspicious nature; venture to the utmost bounds of what is lawful; needlessly frequent the company of scoffers at religion; or, at least, spend more of our leisure hours with the gay and thoughtless, than with sober serious Christians; if our conduct betrays a crafty, political, intriguing spirit; if we discover no relish for retirement; are often and unnecessarily in the tavern, seldom in the closet, and reserve little of our time for reading, meditation, and prayer; if a word scarce ever drops from us in ordinary conversation, that can either instruct or edify, we transgress the precept of giving no offence. With whatever force of argument, and seeming warmth, we recommend from the pulpit heavenly-mindedness and devotion, humility, self-denial, weanedness from the world, uprightness and integrity, the careful improvement of time, and a tender circumspect life, few who observe our behaviour will be charitable, or rather, will be blind enough, to fancy us in earnest. The judicious will shrewdly suspect that pleasure, gain, or honour, is dearer to us than God's glory and the salvation of souls. Good men will be offended; and even bad men, whatever they pretend, will, in their hearts, despise us. We move in a more exalted sphere than others; and, if we would shine as lights of the world, had need to avoid every appearance of evil, and to consider well, not only what is just and pure, but what is lovely and of good report. The world expects

E

that

that we should do honour to our profession, act up to the dignity of our character, and, with the great apostle of the Gentiles, magnify our office, by acquiring, cultivating, and exercising every accomplishment, gift, and grace, that tends to promote our usefulness in the church of Christ. Many things, abstractly considered, may be lawful, which yet are not expedient, and edify not. Duty, indeed, sometimes obliges us to contradict the humours of our people. But it is neither acting a wise nor a good part, to contradict them for contradiction's sake. In matters indifferent, we should become all things to all men, that we may gain the more ; and deny ourselves the use of our lawful liberty, when, by indulging it, our brother would be stumbled, or offended, or made weak.

2. We should give no offence by choosing injudiciously the subjects of our sermons. When we preach what is the result of mere human reason, or teach, for doctrines, the commandments of men ; when we urge uncertain speculations as warmly as if salvation depended on the belief of them ; puzzle our hearers with new schemes unsupported by scripture evidence, or, by forced unnatural interpretations, torture the inspired writings to speak our mind ; when the things we teach, though possibly true in themselves, yet are not important religious truths, explained and enforced in a scriptural strain : we practically declare, by such a conduct, that we have no high esteem for divine revelation, and have forgot our commission as ambassadors of Christ. It would be reckoned arrogant presumption, even in the ambassador of an earthly prince, should he exceed his instructions, and betake himself to his own sagacity, in adjusting the differences of his sovereign with neighbouring states. And can an ambassador

ambassador commissioned by Him, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, be thus unfaithful, without the most daring and impious insolence? He bids fairest to preach with success, who preaches in words, not of man's wisdom, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. The blessed Spirit sets his seal only to doctrines stamped with his own authority, and which flow from that sacred fountain unsullied and pure. The gospel, when mingled with human inventions, loses much of its native lustre, and, like adulterated milk, affords but scanty and unwholesome nourishment. An itch to say what is curious and uncommon, is a dangerous turn of mind in a teacher of Christianity. Common truths are like common blessings; of most use, and of truest worth: and that is the best sermon which makes the grace of God sweet, salvation through Christ acceptable, sin ugly and hateful, and holiness amiable to the soul.

If they give just ground of offence who add to the word of God, they do it also who take from it. All God's words are right. There is nothing froward or perverse in them. Every doctrine and precept is wisely suited to promote God's glory and man's salvation, and was mercifully revealed for that very purpose. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Those entertain too high a conceit of their own penetration, and very mean ideas of the divine wisdom, who fancy it dangerous to preach what the blessed Spirit judged it proper to reveal. If we would keep back from our people nothing profitable, we must endeavour to declare to them the whole counsel of God. Conceal-

ing any part of that form of sound words which our commission directs us to publish, is unfaithfulness to God, and injustice to the souls of men. "He," saith God, "that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully;" Jer. xxiii. 28. And again: "—all the words that I command thee to speak unto them, diminish not a word;" Jer. xxvi. 2.

As wise and faithful stewards, we must regard the whole family, and give to every one his proper portion: teaching the young and ignorant, in a plain familiar manner, the first principles of the oracles of God; and dispensing strong meat to them of full age, who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. The erroneous, we must endeavour, by sound reasoning, to convince of their mistakes. We must unfold the strictness, spirituality, and extent of God's law; and display the awful sanctions that enforce it, to rouse from their spiritual lethargy, the secure and thoughtless, the bold and presumptuous, the proud and self-confident: awakened souls we must gently allure to Christ, by the sweet and free invitations of the gospel; and believers we must exhort, by a faithful discharge of every duty, to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things.

Perhaps it is one chief occasion of our giving offence, by not declaring the whole counsel of God, that there are certain subjects peculiarly easy and agreeable to us, which, on that account, we are apt to imagine the most important, and to insist upon the most frequently. Lecturing usually on large portions of scripture might be some remedy to this evil. Occasions would, in that way, soon present, of explaining every doctrine, and inculcating every duty. Both we and our hearers would grow better acquainted with the
lively

lively oracles, and learn to read them more profitably. Besides, short occasional hints, which naturally arise in our ordinary course of expounding a gospel or epistle, may fall with weight on our hearers ere they are aware, and force conviction. Whereas, when the subject of a sermon is directly levelled against vulgar prejudices or fashionable vices, instantly the alarm is taken, and the mind strengthens itself against evidence. The heart is a fort more easily taken by sap than by storm.

But though we give hints of every truth, our sermons will offend the judicious, if we insist most frequently and earnestly on subjects of lesser importance, and more sparingly and coldly on those branches of Christianity which are most frequently introduced, and have the greatest stress laid upon them, in the sacred writings. Our great business is, to instruct guilty creatures how they may be recovered from the ruins of their apostasy, serve God acceptably here, and enjoy him for ever hereafter. It is justly offensive, if we content ourselves with now and then mentioning, in a slight and overly manner, those things which affect the very vitals of our common Christianity.

If Christ, and salvation through him, are rarely preached, this will be quite opposite to the apostolic pattern. Let it not be pleaded, That these doctrines were more necessary to Jews and Heathens than to professed Christians. A little observation may convince us, that many of our hearers are Christians only in name, and need to be taught these doctrines more perfectly, or, at least, to have deeper impressions of their truth and importance. Besides, it was not barely in addressing infidels, that the apostles insisted on such subjects. They did it also in their epistles to the saints and faithful in Jesus, who knew these things,

things, and were established in the present truth. A considerable part of many of these epistles immediately relates to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. And, in the practical part of them, these peculiar doctrines are often urged as motives even to social and relative duties. For instance, they are urged to dissuade from evil-speaking, and to recommend meekness and gentleness, Tit. iii. 2. & *seqq.* : and in the 8th verse of that chapter, the apostle, after pronouncing the doctrine of justification through Christ *a faithful saying*, enjoins Titus to affirm it constantly, in order to excite believers to carefulness in maintaining good works. But I have a still higher pattern to plead. More of our Lord's sermons are recorded by the beloved disciple than by the other evangelists; and of these the principal subjects are, the dangerous state of the unconverted, and the nature, necessity, and blessed consequences of faith in Christ, of union with him, and of the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. The last and longest of these sermons, though preached to the apostles only, who had long ago professed their dependence on him as their guide to eternal life, yet chiefly relates to the mutual love of Christ and his people, and the safety and comfort that flow from the exercise of faith in him. The doctrine of Christ crucified, is the instituted mean for producing and nourishing the divine life, and should be the centre of our sermons, in reference to, and dependence upon which, other subjects ought to be considered.

The nature of true religion, as distinguished from every counterfeit appearance, the genuine workings of it in the heart, and the fruits of it in the life, are subjects that need to be often explained and inculcated. Scripture abounds with occasional instructions on these heads ;

heads: and the 119th psalm, our Lord's sermon on the mount, the epistle of James, and John's first epistle, treat them designedly, and at full length. On the one hand, we must inculcate it frequently, that however blameless mens outward conduct may appear, yet, if they act barely from selfish interested principles, and have not charity, love to God, to Christ, and to their brethren of mankind, they are nothing, have not the spirit of Christ in them, and are none of his: "The end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." In other words, the end of divine revelation is not gained upon us, till we love our duty, see a beauty and excellency in holiness, and esteem it our meat and drink to do the will of our heavenly Father. On the other hand, we must remind our hearers, that where the tree is good, the fruit also will be good; and that no pretences to faith or love are well founded, which do not justify themselves by a suitable practice. Nor must we content ourselves with general encomiums on holiness and good works. It is necessary, minutely to describe the various graces of the Spirit that constitute the Christian temper, and the various duties we owe to God, our neighbours, and ourselves. We do not comply with the precepts of the apostles, and imitate their example, in speaking the things that become sound doctrine, unless we inculcate upon our hearers the particular obligations that result from their different ages, stations, and relations; Tit. ii. 1, 2. For vice, as well as error, is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God; 1 Tim. i. 9.—11.

Further—We give offence, if we do not insist on subjects suited to the spiritual state of our flocks, and

to the dispensations of providence towards them. In many discourses, the counsel is good, but not for the time; whereas a well-timed discourse bids fairest to strike and edify. There is also a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak. In many cases, we will instruct and admonish in vain, if we stay not till mens minds are calm, composed, and in proper temper to give us a fair hearing. Paul would not feed with strong meat those who were not able to bear it. On some occasions, an oblique hint will irritate more than a severe undisguised reproof would do at another season.

It is evident, from what has been said, that the matter of his sermons must needs give offence, whose ideas of the great truths of Christianity are superficial, confused, and indistinct. Men must have knowledge ere they impart it; and there is one only source whence divine knowledge, without danger of mistake, can be derived, and where it is the duty and interest of the minister of Christ, with the utmost diligence, to dig for it. Let the writings of philosophers, of historians, and of politicians, be their study whose business it is to unfold the secrets of nature, to transmit to posterity the memorable deeds of heroes, or to give counsel to their Sovereign in matters of state. These branches of knowledge are at best ornamental, not essential, to a teacher of Christianity. He may innocently, nay, usefully, amuse himself with them; but he cannot, without sacrilege, devote to them the greatest part of his time. His office is, to make known to perishing sinners the sublime, the affecting, the comforting truths, of the lively oracles; and for that end, attentively to read them, to meditate on them day and night; and, whilst he despises not the labours

labours of able and worthy men, who have endeavoured to illustrate them, to secure a better and more effectual help, by humbly and fervently imploring the Father of lights, to open his eyes to behold wondrous things out of God's word. Thus shall he become a scribe instructed into the kingdom of God, and, like unto a man that is an householder, bring forth out of his treasures things new and old.

3. When ministers give no offence by the subjects of their sermons, they may give a great deal by their manner of handling them. Particularly,

When they preach not in a manner calculated to inform the judgment. Men are rational creatures, and, if we would address them as such, the understanding should, as the leading power, be first applied to. For this purpose, we must clearly open and explain the truth, confirm it by arguments level to the capacities of our hearers, and do all this in plain familiar language, which even those in low life may easily understand. Christianity was designed for the peasant, as well as the philosopher; and, as the learned and wise make a small proportion of most congregations, to preach it in a way in which only they are like to be the better for it, is highly offensive. Philosophy, though from the press it has done religion substantial service; yet, when often introduced in the pulpit, generally hurts it, by usurping the place of what would be more useful, and probably more acceptable too. Scholastical niceties, metaphysical distinctions, and a fine subtle thread of reasoning, may indeed sometimes be necessary in answering metaphysical objections against religion; and therefore, on some rare occasions, the use of them in the pulpit may be profitable: but the bulk of audiences are incapable

ble of following a long and intricate train of thought ; and therefore will be confounded by it, not instructed and convinced. While some may applaud such sermons as deep and rational, the more wise will despise them as idle and injudicious. This, however, is no apology for any who verge to the opposite extreme, flight order and exactness in their compositions, and, instead of keeping close to a subject, entertain their hearers with confused incoherent discourses, empty of sentiment, but full of insipid repetitions, and impertinent rambling excursions.

I say nothing of those, whose long perplexed periods, occasioned by unnecessary epithets and expletives, and parentheses and digressions, render their sermons at once tedious and obscure. This unhappiness of style is remarkable in some who stand in the first rank of genius and penetration, who, exerting thought more intensely than others, had little attention to spare for expression. Their fault is more voluntary, and therefore more offensive, who, by a false affectation of the elegant or the sublime, soar aloft, above the comprehension of their hearers. Bombast descriptions, glittering flowers of eloquence, and luxuriant flights of wit, had better be left to the heroes of romance ^a. Sermons composed in such a style, may indeed entertain and amuse ; but they want perspicuity, the very first and fundamental excellency of speech. Even the justest metaphors, when too much crowded, enervate a discourse ; darken, instead of illustrating, the

^a Hervey of the church of England, and Macswen of the Secession, are agreeable writers ; but to attempt their manner is dangerous, without an uncommonly lively imagination, solid judgment, and correct taste. Luxuriancies of style, generally overlooked in original geniuses, appear ridiculous in their servile imitators,

the sense ; and, to use the words of another, resemble the windows in old cathedrals, in which the painting keeps out the light. I acknowledge, the best sentiments, if conveyed in mean and low images, and clothed in a rustic slovenly dress, provoke laughter in some, and occasion uneasiness in others : but we need not run into a finical nicety of style, in order to avoid a sordid negligence.

Still more offensive than these, is an obscurity affected for its own sake. It must offend every honest man, if, to conceal unpopular opinions, and to put on an air of orthodoxy, we use expressions which may be interpreted with equal ease to divers, and even contrary purposes. Remarkable are the words of Paul, 1 Cor. xiv. 8, 9. " If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle ? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken ? for ye shall speak to the air." If this is a good argument against preaching in an unknown tongue, it is equally good against every thing else that disguises, instead of unfolding our sentiments of Christianity. The apostles used great plainness of speech ; and it is an apostolical injunction, " If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Let his style be plain and clear, like that of the sacred writings ; not dark and ambiguous, like the oracles of the Heathen ^b.

After

^b It was justly observed of the council of Trent, " Nosti artificia horum hominum ; vix unquam aliquid aperte dicunt, vix unquam simpliciter : et cum ceteri homines loquantur ut intelligi possint, isti nihil magis volunt quam ne intelligantur." *Pibraci epistola ad Hospitalium, apud Courayer, in notis ad Fr. Pauli bish. Conc. Trid. t. i. p. 368, edit. Lond.* Too many Protestants have imitated them in this.

After all, informing the judgment, though the first part of our work, is far from the whole of it. Sermons will do little service, if they are not also calculated to command a reverend attention, to strike the conscience, and to warm and affect the heart. We speak as ministers of God; and therefore it becomes us to speak with dignity and boldness, not fearing the face of man. Favour should not bribe, nor frowns nor dangers affright us, from delivering our master's message. I mean not to vindicate pride or passion. A proper decorum should be observed, especially in administering reproof. It is not fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked, or to princes, Ye are ungodly. Persons in public characters must be treated with a deference suited to their station; and even the meanest must not be insulted. Courage, however, and faithfulness, are by no means inconsistent with meekness and discretion; and if the greatest dare grossly and openly to transgress, the minister of Christ should dare to reprove.

Besides the meanness of some, in conniving at fashionable vices, there are others, whose thoughtless unconcerned gesture and pronunciation greatly diminish the dignity of their pulpit performances, and make them received with indifference, perhaps indignation, instead of respect. A light and merry air, an antic jovial carriage, in executing the weighty commission with which God has entrusted us, is contrary to the rules of decency, and cannot fail to prejudice the hearers. It is impossible to be too grave and serious in addresses, on the success of which the happiness of immortal souls in so great a measure depends.

But though our language is plain and elegant, our method accurate, and our manner grave and solemn; yet,

yet, if our discourses are flat and lifeless, they will seldom warm the heart. Mr Melmoth has observed, that in Archbishop Tillotson's sermons, a pathetic animated address is often wanting, even on occasions when naturally we would have expected most of it. Abundance of spirit, however, appears in some of his discourses, especially in exposing the absurdities and impieties of the church of Rome. And it might have been remarked with equal justice, that numerous volumes of sermons, published in England since that time, while inferior to the Archbishop's in important sentiments well arranged, and in many genuine beauties of style, resemble them only in that languid manner of which Melmoth complains. Alas! my brethren, dull and pointless arrows are ill suited to pierce the conscience of hardened sinners. Soft and drowsy harangues, instead of rousing a secure generation, will rather increase their spiritual lethargy; and a cold preacher will soon have a cold auditory. Jesus has entrusted us with the concerns of his people, a people dearly bought, and greatly beloved; we have to do with souls that must be happy or miserable for ever; we address them, in the name of God, upon matters of infinite importance: and is it not an indignity to him, whose ambassadors we are, to execute our commission coolly, and as if half asleep? Will it not tempt others to slight our message, if, by the manner of delivering it, we appear to slight it ourselves? When our own hearts are most impressed with the inestimable worth of immortal souls; when, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh; when our sentiments, style, voice and gesture, discover how much we are in earnest: then we are most likely to touch

touch the hearts of our hearers, and make them feel the force of what we say.

I have said so much upon preaching, as there are more directions and exhortations in scripture with relation to it, than with relation to any other branch of our office; I must barely hint the remaining particulars, lest I encroach too far on your time and patience.

4. We may give offence, not only by an improper manner of preaching, but by a neglect or undue performance of the other public offices of our station.

In leading the devotions of the church, we give offence, when either the matter, expression, or manner, is unsuitable; when we are long and tedious; mingle our own passions and prejudices with our addresses to God; introduce disputable matters, in which many sincere Christians cannot join with us; when we adapt not our prayers to the particular circumstances and necessities of our people; hurry them over carelessly; discover no becoming seriousness and solemnity of spirit, no realizing sense of the value of the blessings for which we plead; and when we seem to forget that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, through whom alone our guilty race can obtain access to God, and acceptance with him.

It is just cause of offence, and, did vital piety flourish, would be offensive to our people, that the Lord's Supper is so seldom dispensed. And as our manner of dispensing that ordinance is one chief hinderance of its frequency, it is worthy our inquiry, how far that also is blameable. Undoubtedly we give offence, if, for trifling unwarrantable causes, we put off administering it; or if we usurp the prerogative of Christ, as sole lawgiver of the church, by making the terms of
Christian

Christian communion either wider or narrower than he has made them.

And this leads me to observe, that as the discipline of the church is in part committed to us, we give offence if we exercise it with respect of persons; and, through a mistaken tenderness for any, or a fear of incurring their displeasure, allow them to live without due censure, in the open practice of scandalous crimes, instead of rebuking them with authority, that others also may fear. At the same time, we give offence, if we claim a right to judge them that are without. It is an offence against common sense, to expel men from a society to which they never seemed to belong, and to debar them from privileges, to which they never had, or pretended to have, any title.

Probably some might be offended, and none greatly edified, should I say much on our conduct in judicatures. Of this subject, much has been said from the pulpit, and on occasions too where no purpose of edification could be gained by saying any thing. This much, however, may I hope be said, without impropriety, on such an occasion. To act a juggling unsteady part, and, from connexions of any kind, to vary from our professed principles; to sneak, and cringe, and prostitute our consciences, either to the humours of the great, or to the prejudices of the populace; to behave with insolence to men our superiors in age and experience; to listen with avidity to one side of a question, while we deny a fair and full hearing to the other; to silence sober reasoning by raillery, by dark malicious innuendoes, by bitter satirical invectives, or by noisy cries for a vote; to treat one another with harshness and severity for different sentiments and different conduct in matters of doubtful disputation; cannot

cannot fail to offend every cool and impartial observer. Nor can it, I think, be disputed, that we give offence, if we examine slightly the opinions, dispositions, and abilities of those we recommend to important offices; and solemnly attest, that men have qualifications, which either we know that they want, or at least know not that they have.

In ordaining to the ministry, we act in the name of Christ; and therefore give offence if we act against his authority, or without it. Genius, learning, prudence, aptness to teach, are all necessary parts of furniture for a minister; and, in ordinary cases, without some measure of them, none ought to be set apart to that honourable service. But the most eminent gifts and abilities, when grace does not direct the proper use of them, may too probably qualify men to be plagues, instead of blessings to the church of God. Jesus would not commit his sheep to Peter, till he had answered satisfactorily the question, " Lovest thou me?" He who knows all things, knew the love of his disciple; and therefore thus inquired, chiefly for our sakes, that in committing to others the ministry of reconciliation, we should follow his steps. They who have seen Christ's beauty, tasted his love, and felt the pleasures and advantages of religion, are peculiarly qualified, by this their Christian experience, to recommend them to others with dignity and freedom. Singular activity is requisite, in the many labours, and singular fortitude and firmness of mind, in the many difficulties and afflictions, to which faithful ministers are exposed. Now, love, and love alone, will reconcile to these; nay, render them a delight. Untender, therefore, and unkind we are to the feeble flock of Christ, if we commit them to men, who

for

for aught we know or care, bear them no affection ; and probably, instead of feeding and defending them, may poison them, or expose them to be devoured. None will presume thus to plead before Christ in the great day of account : “ It is true, we intrusted souls, “ dear in thy sight, and for whom thou didst shed “ thy precious blood, to one, whose conduct seemed “ to discover, that his natural enmity to thee remain- “ ed unsubdued. But he was an agreeable compani- “ on, a man of strong natural powers, and an accom- “ plished orator.” If such a plea would be absurd, must not that conduct be absurd which requires it ? We are not indeed to seek, for we cannot obtain, an absolute certainty, that those we ordain are lovers of Jesus. It is God’s prerogative to search the heart ; and the judgment we form, on the most probable evidence, may prove wrong. But it is enough to warrant our act, if there be a profession of real religion, and an outward conduct in some measure agreeable to that profession : and, without doubt, different sentiments of a candidate, and different opportunities of knowing him thoroughly, may justify some in bearing a part in his ordination, when it would be in others presumptuous wickedness. There is one thing more in our ordinations, which, I think, merits our serious attention ; and that is, the solemnly giving to one, in the name of Jesus, the charge of a congregation unwilling to submit to him, and among whom there is no probability of his usefulness ^c. Upon what princi-

F

ples

^c The zeal of Passius, canon of Valencia, outran his knowledge, when he maintained in the council of Trent, that it was a devilish pestilent invention of late heretics, destructive of faith and of the church of God, to ascribe to any claim of right the voice or consent allowed

ples this can be vindicated, I am yet to learn. The state must no doubt determine what shall be the established religion, and who shall be entitled to the legal benefice for teaching it; but no government ought, and our government does not attempt, to impose upon any, either a religion, or an instructor in religion. It is still more difficult to conceive, why a conscientious scruple to bear a part in an ordination, the form of which seems to assert a falsehood, should exclude a man, otherwise qualified, from serving God in the gospel of his Son. I have seen no act of Parliament, or constitution of the church of Scotland, that enjoins this. Sure I am, it is not enjoined by Christian forbearance and love.

5. We give offence, by the neglect or undue performance of the more private duties of our calling.

If we pay no regard to the souls of our charge, unless in the pulpit, and immediate preparation for it; if we seem indifferent how we stand in the esteem and affection of our people, or what is the success of our labours; if we use not every proper method for conveying and cherishing religious impressions, for preventing backslidings, and for recovering those that have fallen, from their spiritual decays; if we neglect to warn the unruly, to comfort them that mourn, to visit the afflicted, and to catechize the young and ignorant, when we have any probable prospect that these servi-

ces

allowed the people in the choice of their pastors; which was a mere favour, revocable at pleasure. Yet he certainly argued consistently, in insisting, that those passages should be expunged from the pontifical which seem to suppose such consent necessary; particularly where the bishop says, in ordaining a presbyter, "*Non frustra a patribus institutum, ut de electione eorum qui ad regimen altaris adhibendi sunt, consulatur et populus; quia necesse est, ut facilius ei quis obedientiam exhibeat ordinato, cui assensum præbuerit ordinando.*"

ces may be useful ; or if we manage our visits to the sick so incautiously, that bystanders are encouraged to put off thoughts of repentance to their last moments, and thereby sustain a hurt which any good done to the dying will seldom balance ; we greatly fail of our duty, and are guilty of giving offence.

II. I now proceed briefly to enforce the exhortation of giving no offence.

The text itself suggests a powerful argument. If we give offence, the ministry will be blamed. The people of God will justly be angry with us, and condemn our faulty conduct. Nay, possibly, all our future ministrations will, in their eyes, become hateful or contemptible ; and thus a fair prospect of usefulness be unhappily blasted. Though a man could speak like an oracle, little regard will be paid to what he says when his credit is sunk.

Nor is this the worst : the ungodly confine not their censures to the weak or worthless minister ; but, as though one clergyman stood representative of all, take occasion, from his licentiousness or imprudence, to traduce ministers in general as fools or knaves. In every place there are subtle emissaries of Satan, who incessantly watch for our halting, and take a handle, from the least misbehaviour of which we are guilty, to reflect on the most innocent of our brethren. The enemies of Jesus are fond of every thing that can expose our order : and if our conduct is profligate, or our pulpit-compositions despicable, that affords them the wished-for pretext to gratify their malice. The cry is, They are all alike. Nay, it is well if the sacred office itself be not aspersed, and the wisdom of God who instituted it arraigned. Thus, when we

F 2

depart

depart out of the way, it causes many to stumble at the law, and to abhor the offering of the Lord. Jesus himself is crucified afresh, and his holy religion reproached through our faults, unjustly imputed to them. We are ambassadors for Christ; and by our ill management of that trust, disgrace is reflected on him in whose name we act; the cause of God suffers, the hearts of the godly are grieved, the wicked are hardened in their wickedness, and precious souls eternally perish. Wo to the world because of offences. It must needs be that offences come; but wo to the man, double wo to the minister, by whom they come: it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the depths of the sea. Though his heavenly Master, who invested him with so honourable an office, is present, and observes his conduct, he dares to be indolent in his service, and basely to betray his interest. He scruples not the most direct and horrible perjury, by violating the solemn engagements he came under, to take heed to the flock of which he was ordained an overseer. He feels no remorse for offending the Sovereign of Zion, by a neglect of duty, and a breach of trust, which, in his own servant, or in the servant of an earthly sovereign, would have appeared to him infamous and detestable. But possibly, when death is about to seal the eyes of his body, the eyes of his soul may be opened to perceive things as they really are. After having spent his life in doing the work of the Lord deceitfully, and pursuing the honours, riches, and pleasures of this world, not the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, methinks I see him receive the awful summons, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou must be no longer steward. He feels himself about to be dragged

ged to a state of misery, eternal and intolerable. Conscience awakes from its fatal slumber, and by the most cruel and unsupportable reproaches, avenges his contempt of its old and long-forgotten remonstrances. His wonted arts of stilling this inward tormentor, now lose their power. Fearfulness and trembling come upon him, and horror overwhelms him. Hell is naked before him, and destruction without a covering. And God, justly provoked, laughs at his calamity, and mocks when his fear cometh. Yet, possibly, another, equally unfaithful, may have no bonds in his death, and leave this world as he lived in it, thoughtless of God and duty, and regardless of eternity. But if dying does not, surely death shall put an end to his peace. See him appearing before the tribunal of a now inexorable judge. Behold his countenance changed, his thoughts troubling him, the joints of his loins loosed, and his knees smiting one against another; when, lo! a voice more dreadful than thunder thus accosts him: "Wicked and slothful servant, what hadst thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth; seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?" Mark a numerous flock ruined by his negligence or bad example. Listen to them calling for vengeance. The cry of their blood enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; and the irreversible doom is pronounced, "Take him, bind him hand and foot, cast him into utter darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

Turn away from this shocking scene, and observe on the right hand of the Son of man a faithful pastor. Possibly his dying words were words of triumph and transport: "This is my rejoicing, the testimony of

“ my conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity,
“ not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God,
“ I have had my conversation in the world. I have
“ fought a good fight, I have finished my course,
“ I have kept the faith. Henceforth is laid up for
“ me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the
“ righteous judge, shall give me at that day : and not
“ to me only, but to all them also that love his ap-
“ pearing.” But with what superior joy does he lift
up his head, when he rests from his labours, when his
warfare is accomplished, and the day of his complete
redemption dawns ! He walked with God in peace
and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.
These he now presents to the Great Shepherd of the
sheep, saying, “ Behold me, and the children thou hast
“ given me.” He is their rejoicing, and they also are
his rejoicing, in the day of the Lord Jesus. Joyful to
both was the sound of the gospel : but more joyful,
now, is the final sentence, “ Well done, good and
“ faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few
“ things, I will make thee ruler over many things :
“ enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

If, therefore, we have any zeal for the glory of
God, if any regard for the interest of the Redeemer’s
kingdom, if any tender concern for the salvation of
our hearers, and if, in the great day of the Lord, we
would not be found among them that offend, and work
iniquity, and after having prophesied in Christ’s name,
hear him pronounce against us the dreadful sentence,
“ Depart from me ; I know you not :” Let us take
heed to ourselves, and to our doctrine, and walk cir-
cumspectly, not as fools, but as wise ; giving no of-
fence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.

It

It is now time to hasten to a conclusion. If it is our duty to give no offence, how difficult then is our office! what superior accomplishments, natural and acquired, what exalted improvements in vital piety, what continual aids of the Holy Spirit, are requisite to preserve from giving offence in any thing, men exposed to such a variety of temptations and snares! The best of us have cause, with grief and self-abasement, to acknowledge, that in many things we daily offend. Let us not, however, sink into slothfulness and despair. God's grace will be sufficient for us, if we humbly implore it, and he will perfect strength in our weakness. Say not, O humble servant of Christ, I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that God shall send thee; and whatsoever he commandeth thee, thou shalt speak. What he has done for many others, may greatly encourage our prayers and endeavours. We have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what burning and shining lights have gone before us in the work of the Lord. We have heard of their holy exemplary lives; their strict discipline, both in their own families and in the church of God; the gravity, nay, dignity, of their appearance; their animated penetrating sermons, and their edifying manner in familiar discourse. May a double portion of their excellent spirit rest upon us who come after them! And when, from time to time, our fathers are stripped of their priestly robes, may the sons of the prophets who stand up in their room, even exceed them in knowledge of divine things, in piety, in wisdom, in diligence, in success! that thus our holy religion may descend uncorrupted to distant ages, and the people which shall be created may praise the Lord.

I have been exhorting myself and my reverend fathers and brethren, not to give offence. It is equally necessary to exhort you, our hearers, not to be hasty in taking it. Be tender, my friends, of our reputation. If any thing is insinuated to our disadvantage, be not rash and easy in believing it. If the charge is not supported by sufficient evidence, regard it not. Against an elder receive not an accusation under two or three witnesses. By wounding our good name, you render our ministry despicable and unsuccessful; than which nothing can be more pleasing to Satan, or hurtful to your own eternal interests. Judge not our cause, till you have given it a fair impartial hearing. Pass no sentence against us, till you know we have done what is alleged, and till you also know we had no good reason for doing it. And since God instructs you by men of like passions and infirmities with yourselves, expect not from them angelical perfection. Make candid allowances for those errors and frailties that are incident to the wisest and best of men. Throw over them the veil of charity. Do not form a judgment of our general character from one unguarded word or action. God hath threatened, that those shall be cut off that watch for iniquity; that make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate. You expect we should give no offence by the neglect of our duty: we, with the same justice, expect, that you should give no offence by the neglect of yours; and offence you give us, if you do not attend our ministerial instructions, implore the blessing of God upon them, and actually improve by them. If many professed Christians spent not more time in censuring ministers than in praying for them, the ministry in this land would be
less

less blamed than it is at present, and probably less blameworthy too. Meantime, what is amiss in our conduct, will be no excuse for despising the message we bring in the name of Jesus, and persisting in impenitence and unbelief.

If an inoffensive ministry is thus important, how careful should patrons be to present, and parishes still enjoying the important privilege of election, to call none to the pastoral office, who may be in danger of giving offence by their weak abilities, unsound principles, or dissolute lives!—And how foolish and criminal a part do candidates act, who hastily rush into the sacred function, ere they have laid in the necessary furniture for discharging it honourably! Is there not cause to fear, that not their character only, but religion in general, may suffer for the reproach of their youth?

Upon the whole, would we give no offence as men, as Christians, as ministers of Christ; let us search out the sins and infirmities to which we are chiefly liable, that we may guard against these with peculiar care. In order to discover our weak side, let us duly regard the opinion others entertain of us. Let us not interpret friendly admonition as a disparagement and affront, but thankfully receive it, as a mark of unfeigned affection. Say, with David, “ Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be as excellent oil which shall not break my head.” We are often blind to our own failings; and happy are we, if we can engage some wise and good man, who tenderly regards our welfare, to point them out. But if we find none thus faithful and honest, let us wisely improve the accusations

accusations of enemies, and learn from them those blemishes and defects, to which, without the help of such ill-natured monitors, we might have remained strangers.

May we all, whether in public or private stations, be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, shining as lights in the world, maintaining always consciences void of offence towards God and towards man. And may the Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. Let him not leave us nor forsake us, that he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his holy commandments for ever.

A P P E N D I X.

[The preceding sermon having been first preached at an ordination, the charges then delivered to the minister and congregation are here subjoined.]

CHARGE TO THE MINISTER.

THOUGH giving the usual charge would have better become one or other of our venerable fathers, yet, since the place where I stand requires it, suffer me, reverend Sir, to be your monitor. Providence has called you to an honourable, but, at the same time, a difficult office. Gifts are necessary to capacitate you for it; grace, to animate you to discharge it faithfully. A small measure of gifts, and low attainments in grace, will poorly answer these important purposes. If you would be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and

meet

meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work, covet earnestly the best gifts; the gift of knowledge, the gift of utterance, the gift of prudence. Lift up your heart to the Father of lights, in humble fervent supplication, that he would plentifully pour out upon you these, and every other good and perfect gift: and as they are not now imparted miraculously, but acquired through the blessing of God on the use of means, join to your prayers, diligent application to study. Meditate on divine things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all. Those of the most extensive knowledge, know only in part, and need to learn the way of God more perfectly. Give attendance to reading. Make a wise choice of the books you read. Study those most which most tend to increase in you the dispositions and abilities proper for your office. There is one book, or rather collection of books, which, without an appearance of arrogance, I may venture to recommend, as of all others the best; I need not say, I mean the Bible. Make that your chief study; for, if rightly understood, and improved, it is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work. Apollos's character, was, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures." It were to be wished, that both branches of the character were found in every minister; yet the last is by much the most valuable. If we are well acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel, and the arguments that support them; and understand the duties of the Christian life, the motives that enforce them, the hinderances of their practice, and the best methods of removing these hinderances; we may, by manifestation of the truth, commend

commend ourselves to mens consciences in the fight of God ; though to those who are enamoured with the enticing words of man's wisdom, and who regard sound and show more than substance, our bodily presence may appear weak, and our speech contemptible.

Be equally diligent to improve in every holy disposition. Your public work will be much affected by the frame of your spirit. If you decline in religion, your flock will fare the worse : but the better Christian you are, the more useful minister you are like to be. Seek, therefore, above all things, to grow in grace ; especially in that excellent grace of love, love to God, love to Christ, and love to precious souls. For this purpose, live a life of faith on the Son of God. Abide in him, and constantly depend upon him for all needful supplies of divine influence. Then will you feel your master's work a delight, not a burden, and will vigorously exert your abilities for the glory of God, and the welfare of man. Your sermons will be serious, your prayers fervent, your private conversation will naturally turn to subjects good for the use of edifying, and your life, as well as doctrine, will point out the path to the heavenly mansions.

With pure and upright intentions, dedicate yourself to the service of God in the gospel of his Son. Take the oversight of the flock, not by constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. To use the words of another on a like occasion, ^a " You
" had

^a President Burr's sermon at Bostwic's ordination, p. 31. Mr Bostwic, in a sermon before the synod of New-York, May 1758, printed at Philadelphia, and since reprinted at London, has justly described the influence of selfishness in perverting a gospel ministry. The late Principal Gowdie intended to republish it here ; and good judges, both of the church of England, the church of Scotland, and the Secession, wish it were more known among us.

“ had better be the offscouring of all flesh, than preach
 “ to gain the vain applause of your fellow-worms.
 “ You had better beg your bread, than enter upon
 “ the ministry as a trade to live by. However those
 “ may live, who act from no higher principle, it will
 “ be dreadful dying for them, and more dreadful ap-
 “ pearing before their judge.” Expect, therefore,
 your reward from God only. Resolve, in divine
 strength, at no time to use flattering words or a cloak
 of covetousness; neither of man to seek glory, but e-
 ver to speak and act, not as pleasing men, but God,
 which trieth the heart.

Be diligent and faithful in the actual discharge of
 your office. Take heed to the ministry thou hast re-
 ceived of the Lord, that thou fulfil it. The longest
 life quickly hastens to a period; your time for service
 swiftly flies away, and will soon be irrecoverably past
 and gone; work, therefore, the work of him that
 sent you while it is day. The night cometh, when no
 man can work. Make full proof of thy ministry.
 Think not, that performing one branch of duty,
 will atone for neglecting another; but, in so far as
 time and strength permit, attend upon each in its pro-
 per season.

Allot the greatest proportion of your time to those
 parts of your work, public or private, that are most
 essential and important. Preach the word, reprove,
 rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering. Study your
 sermons well, and beware of offering to God and his
 people that which costs you nothing. Endeavour to
 be thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances and
 dispositions of your hearers, their prejudices against
 religion, and the rocks on which their souls are in
 most hazard of being shipwrecked. Suit your dis-
 courses

courses to their various necessities. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Seek out and set in order acceptable words ; and when about to prepare for the pulpit, beg the direction of the Spirit in choosing a subject, his assistance in composing and delivering your sermon, and his blessing to render it effectual. Arrows thus fetched from heaven bid fairest to reach the cases of your hearers, and to pierce their hearts.

Take heed to yourself as well as to your doctrine. Let your life testify, that you believe what you preach. Be wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. Fly youthful lusts : but be a pattern to believers, in words, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Win the affection of all, by an obliging courteous behaviour ; and, by preserving a suitable dignity of character, secure their esteem. An affable, condescending manner, has often recommended a bad cause ; and sourness and ill-nature have raised unconquerable prejudices against many a good one. The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.—But though meekness should temper your zeal, remember that zeal in return should enliven your meekness. You enter on the ministry in a day in which iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. The peculiar doctrines of Christianity are run down and opposed, and a tender circumspect behaviour ridiculed, by many who value themselves as standards of genius or politeness.

politeness. In such a day, exert your courage to stem that torrent of infidelity and vice, which threatens to break in upon us, and destroy every thing valuable. Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. Be not ashamed of Christ's words and ways in an adulterous and perverse generation; lest the Son of man be ashamed of you, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.

These things, my dear brother, are no easy task. I hope you have often counted the cost, and with deep concern lamented your insufficiency. But know, for your encouragement, through Christ strengthening you, you may do all things. He hath said to his ministers, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." And faithful is he who hath promised, who also will do it.

If your labours should not be crowned with the desired success, be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap if you faint not. Though Israel should not be gathered, yet, if faithful in your work, you shall receive a glorious recompense. Besides, success may come when you expect it least. Be instant, therefore, in season, and out of season. He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

CHARGE TO THE PEOPLE.

I shall now conclude, with a short address to the people of this congregation.

Be thankful, my brethren, for a gospel-ministry. Let the infidel and profane account it a burden, not a blessing

blessing to society : but do you admire the goodness of God in an institution so wisely calculated to promote your best interests. Was it not for public teaching, ignorance and vice would soon grow to so prodigious a height, that not even the form of religion would remain.—Receive with becoming affection him who is this day ordained your pastor. Consider the dignity of the office with which he is invested, and entertain him with suitable respect. Ministers are men of God ; they minister in his name, and by his appointment. See, then, that your pastor be with you without fear ; because he worketh the work of the Lord. Esteem him highly in love, for his work's sake. Ministers would labour with better success, if they lived more in the hearts of their people. Add not, therefore, to your pastor's difficulties, by an undutiful carriage. Rather assist and strengthen him to bear up under them. Put the best construction on his words and actions, which they can possibly bear ; and treat him not rudely ; and vent not your spleen against him, though in his doctrine or life, lesser blemishes should appear. Curb such an insolent intemperate zeal, by reflecting on the apostle's direction : “ Rebuke not an elder, but “ intreat him as a father.” Contempt cast upon faithful ministers, and injuries done them, Christ will resent as done to himself.

Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is. Withdraw not from ordinances dispensed by your pastor, though his sentiments in lesser matters should differ from yours. I say, in lesser matters : for if an angel may be lawfully accursed, surely a minister may be lawfully deserted, who preaches another gospel, who lays another foundation for the hopes of guilty sinners, than God hath laid. But bring

not

not against him unjustly so heavy a charge. Remember, in this imperfect state, lesser mistakes are unavoidable, and will not vindicate your separating from him. And where a case is not extremely clear, you owe considerable deference to his judgment, as he has greater leisure than most of you for studying, and greater advantages for understanding the sacred oracles. Let, therefore, your pastor ever find you humble and teachable, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Come not to church with a captious quarrelsome disposition. With what heart can ministers preach, when hearers are still upon the catch, eager to pick up something with which to find fault? Act a worthier part. Laying aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisy, and envying, and evil-speaking, hearken with meekness to that ingrafted word which is able to save your souls: like the noble Bereans, receive the instructions of your teacher with all readiness of mind: not yielding them, however, an implicit faith, but searching the scriptures daily, whether these things are so. In so far as they stand the test of that infallible touchstone, regard them not as the word of man, but as they are in truth, the word of the living God.

See that you reject not Christ, when, by his ministers, he speaketh to you from heaven. When he calls, do not refuse; when he stretcheth forth his hand, do not disregard it. Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls. While you have the light, walk in the light, lest darkness come upon you. It is but for a little ministers can be useful; ere long, they must cease to preach, and you to hear. Those servants of God who now show to you the way of salvation, must, in a while, resign their places; and the eye that now sees them, must see them

no more. Comply, then, with their wholesome counsels, while yet you enjoy them; lest you mourn at the last, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my soul despised reproof! I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me.

Second the labours of your minister, by private endeavours, suitable to your several stations, for the good of souls. Train up your children in the way that they should go, and encourage any serious impressions made upon them. When discipline is exercised against open offenders, show that the honour of God, and the happiness of precious souls, lie nearer your hearts than the ease and reputation of any man. The efficacy of church-censures will much depend on your conduct towards those who fall under them. Have no company with such, that they may be ashamed: and if they will not hear the church, let them be to you as heathen men and publicans.

And when you are allowed the nearest access to a throne of grace, and feel your hearts in the most devout and heavenly frame, wrestle and make supplication for your minister, that his own soul may prosper and be in health; that the presence of God may accompany him in all his ministrations; and that when he plants and waters, God himself may give the increase.

May his doctrine drop as the rain, and his speech distil as the dew: And may the soul of every one of you be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.

DIS-

DISCOURSE III.

THE BLESSING OF CHRISTIAN TEACHERS.

Preached at the Admission of the Rev. Mr DAVID BLACK, as
Minister of Lady Yester's Kirk,
EDINBURGH, 20th November 1794.

ISAIAH XXX. 20.

THINE EYES SHALL SEE THY TEACHERS.

THESE words immediately respect a period, when God gave his people the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction. Yet they have often been accomplished in peaceable and prosperous times:—and, in peaceable and prosperous times, may many now hearing me, and their children and childrens children, see them farther accomplished, in the happy consequences of the transactions of this day! Though the gospel first began to be preached by the Lord; yet, as it was expedient that he should go away, he has instituted, and in every age preserved, an order of men, for guiding others in the way of faith, of holiness, and of peace.

What I chiefly intend, in discoursing from the words, is, a brief survey of the advantages which men derive from this institution. I begin with advantages more indirect and occasional.

1. Attend to the thousands who devote themselves to the service of the sanctuary, and whose characters

are improved and ennobled by their previous studies. With what diligence and success, prompted by motives of piety and benevolence, do they search for the good way, that they may walk in it themselves, and teach and recommend it to others with advantage! Their gifts ripen and expand; their moral and religious excellencies become distinguished. Through the grace of God exciting and prospering their pious efforts, they conquer vicious and irregular propensities, restrain unworthy inclinations, and encounter and overcome their spiritual foes. From a devout study of the sacred oracles, they in some measure acquire the spirit of their inspired penmen. Giving themselves to the word of God and to prayer, and, in subserviency to these, to inquiries after truth, to meditation, and to the perusal of useful human writings; their good resolutions strengthen; and their knowledge, wisdom, activity and usefulness, increase. Thus, they acquire degrees of excellence, which their other advantages would not have procured them, had they been placed in a different line of life.

Others, who sincerely desire it, from the calls of secular business, find it more difficult to separate themselves, and intermeddle with heavenly wisdom. But he who wishes to be faithful and successful in the work of the ministry; free from many of these avocations, like Ezra, prepares his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do and teach it. Often he meditates on the majesty, the greatness, and the goodness of Him, who formed the earth by his power, created the world by his wisdom, and stretched forth the heavens by his discretion: Often he reflects on that Providence, which brings good out of evil, light out of darkness, and order out of confusion: Often he contemplates
the

the obedience and sufferings of his Saviour; and while, with angels, he pries into the mysteries of redeeming love, like the meditations of angels, his meditations of God are sweet, and his soul glad in the Lord. Beholding in the glass of God's works, and still more in the glass of his word, the glory of the Lord, he is changed into the same image from glory to glory. The duties of his office frequently lead him to contemplate, to admire, and to adore Him that sitteth on the throne, and the Lamb; and thus give him foretastes of heaven, and prepare him for its exalted blessedness. He studies and delivers sermons on the unsatisfying nature, and uncertain continuance, of worldly enjoyments; on the value of time, and on the awfulness of death, judgment, and eternity. The truths suggested on these, and other important subjects, deeply impress his heart. While watering others, he himself also is watered. When he visits the chambers of the dying; the triumphs of the believer, and sometimes the terrors, though perhaps more frequently the stupidity, of the impenitent, awaken his tenderest feelings. By the joyful, or by the sorrowful countenances he beholds, his heart is made better. Painful experience of the imperfections and blemishes of his own character, and observation of the general depravity of mankind, and of the follies, weaknesses, and transgressions, from which even the best are not free, stimulate him to the prayer of faith for a larger measure of the influences of the blessed Spirit. His prayers are accepted on God's altar: and, if the contradiction and opposition of men, who go on frowardly in the way of their own hearts, often try; they often also improve his meekness, forgiveness, and christian compassion. And now, who can fully reckon up,

and sufficiently estimate, the general increase of happiness, from the numbers and succession of men, who thus become the salt of the earth, and the light of the world, and advance in knowledge, in religion, in virtue?

How delightful to a thoughtful mind, and to a holy heart, the duty of frequently contemplating the perfections, councils, works, and word of God; the holiness, justice, and goodness of the divine law; and the love and mercy displayed in the contrivance, purchase, and application of redemption! If, from the bent of one's genius, the acquisition of some branches of science, useful for illustrating and defending the sacred oracles, or of the languages in which they were originally written, is at first difficult and unpleasant: when, from a sense of duty, these difficulties are surmounted, the labour is amply recompensed, in new sources of innocent entertainment, in personal improvement, and in public usefulness. Animated with the hope, that the disobedient may be turned to the wisdom of the just, and that the hearts of saints may be enlarged to run in the ways of God's commandments; the pious teacher is glad when it is said to him, Let us go up to the house of the Lord; and, when his hopes are realized, the lover of God and the friend of mankind rejoices as with the joy of harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

2. Public teachers often refine the taste, improve the genius, civilize the manners, and promote the literary pursuits of a nation. The advantages of this kind derived from their labours, though much inferior to others afterwards to be mentioned, are yet important enough to demand our grateful notice and acknowledgement. It is chiefly in Christian countries,

that

that the valuable remains of Eastern, of Greek, and of Roman wisdom and eloquence, have been preserved, studied, imitated, and sometimes even excelled. Christian countries have produced the most complete and accurate books of history, geography, chronology and antiquities; and the most judicious systems of natural religion, of morals, both as respecting individuals and nations, of jurisprudence, and of political knowledge. Christians have conducted philosophical inquiries with the best success, and improved them for the most useful and benevolent purposes. If these things are good and profitable to society, (and that they are good and profitable, my present hearers need not be told), a large portion of the honour of such usefulness belongs to men set for the defence of the gospel, desirous by sound reasoning to convince gain-sayers, and conscious what arms human literature furnishes for this holy war. Of these defenders of the faith, many were clergymen, and laid the foundation of their knowledge in preparing for their sacred office: and many, who were not clergymen, owed their education, and their love of learning and religion, to those who were.

From the history of the primitive church, of the dark ages, of the reformation and revival of learning, and of modern times; what I have said might, with ease, be amply confirmed. I would however especially lead your attention, to what immediately results from teachers of Christianity acting in that capacity, and publicly instructing others by their sermons or expositions of scripture. To thousands, who have no leisure nor opportunity to form their taste, or cultivate their rational powers, by conversation with the wise and enlightened, or by reading their works, a school

is thus open, established indeed for higher purposes, where men of sound understandings, though low in rank, may, without expence, and almost without intending it, learn, from example, to distinguish or connect ideas, to infer one truth from another, to examine the force of an argument, and so to arrange and express their sentiments, as deeply to impress themselves and others. As, in a few years, the child gradually acquires the faculty of speaking his mother-tongue, with a considerable degree of ease, fluency, and perfection, without any formal lessons, merely by hearing it spoken : so, there is a natural logic and rhetoric, which some acquire without designing it, who go to church for nobler ends, by which they are happily enabled to detect the cunning craftiness, whereby enemies of religion, or of public tranquillity, ly in wait to deceive. Indeed, the culture of the talents, and the improvement of the intellectual abilities of that respectable class of men, who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, generally rises or falls, in proportion to the character and genius of their religious instructors. In those parts of Britain, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and the American States, where a devout attendance on religious instruction is most general ; good sense, sound judgment, and a discerning spirit, are most conspicuous. But where the reverse takes place, and churches are deserted, either from aversion to religion, or from dislike of its ministers ; ignorance, rudeness, and contempt of the most necessary and useful knowledge, gradually become the prevailing character of the people.

3. Instructions from the pulpit, greatly promote a virtuous behaviour. Illustrations of the love and fear of God, of purity, temperance, industry ; relative duties,

ties, among which, subjection to magistrates holds a chief rank; of justice, integrity, and benevolence; illustrations of these, and other moral obligations, in their nature, extent, and operations; displays of their native beauty and excellence, and of their tendency to promote serenity of mind, an unsullied character, and outward prosperity; and striking pictures of the anguish, shame, and misery, resulting from the opposite vices; have produced and strengthened thousands of good resolutions. A thoughtless sinner goes to church merely from custom or decency. He hears that there is no peace, no happiness, to the wicked. His conscience testifies, that the warning is well-founded. Though his heart is not changed, a multitude of base thoughts, unworthy inclinations, shameful designs, destructive plans, suggested by ambition, avarice, or voluptuousness, are stifled in the birth, and their execution happily prevented. Thus, the peace and order so essential to the happiness of families, societies and states, are in some measure maintained, and good men are preserved from many evils, to which, from deceit and violence, they would otherwise have been exposed. Were, even for a few months, churches shut up, sermons prohibited, and Sabbaths employed in business or amusement; the influence which religious and moral obligations retain over many of the unconverted, would soon cease; the laws of righteousness and humanity would be trampled under foot; and no crime scrupled, which gratified a ruling passion. One serious pathetic preacher does more to reclaim the profligate, and to check the grosser irruptions of criminal appetite, than a hundred philosophical or political essays. Blind is that country, and wretched must it be, where pure religion is not taught, and where the worth of the faithful

faithful watchman is not known, till the want of those true friends of the prince and of the people, introduces envy, strife, confusion, and every evil work.

4. Attend to the gentle, penetrating, beneficent effects of pastoral instruction, on the sorrowful, the disconsolate, the tempted, the doubting, the feeble-minded, the sick, and the dying. What lover of mankind would not applaud an institution, by which, for more than seventeen hundred years, the poor have been learned to suffer want, the afflicted in patience to possess their souls, the anxious to be careful for nothing, and the fearful to hope in God? Exquisite pains have thus been softened, the heaviest griefs assuaged, and, in nights of darkness, of perplexity, and of terror, light has shined. Call not then an order pernicious or unprofitable, which has comforted thousands of mourners: Call not men the poison or pest of society, from whose exertions so much good has followed. What! Is the nature of things changed? Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Can the apostles of scepticism, of infidelity, of atheism; can they boast that such blessings are the consequence of their labours? Go to the country where tyranny wears the mask of liberty, and where there is no peace to him that cometh in, or to him that goeth out; ask the wretched inhabitants: and, when thou returnest, if thou art permitted to return, tell thy friends, whether, in the multitude of their sorrowful thoughts within them, the comforts of freethinking and irreligion supported their souls.

Alas! the path to inward peace, when without are fightings, and within are fears, they have not known. But, hast thou not seen, hast thou not heard, hath it not been told thee, with what eagerness and pleasure, sufferers,

sufferers, when sinking in the depths of distress, have listened to him who weeps with them that weep, and have learned, in the school of Christ, to pour what is infinitely better than wine or oil, into their painful wounds? Sympathy gives strength to the feeblest efforts for solacing sorrow. He, who sincerely wishes the welfare of the afflicted, promotes it by a thousand little attentions, the natural effects, without a moment's deliberation, of the dispositions of his heart. Every look, every word which indicates attachment and tenderness, touches the heart. Delicacy and compassion, without any formal design, brighten many an hour of sadness, by things which, in the moment of saying or doing them, they accounted trifles, and the next moment utterly forgot. What then may they not perform, when, divinely directed, they point out to the sons of sadness the balm in Gilead, the Physician there, the consolations of God, which are neither few nor small? Often they are the instruments of appointing to the mourner beauty for ashes, and for the spirit of heaviness the garments of praise; and even, sometimes, make him forget his sorrows, or remember them as waters that are past. Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground: yet man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards. It is therefore an institution well calculated for diminishing and alleviating distress, that an order of men, qualified to comfort those in any trouble, with the comfort whereby they themselves have been comforted of God, should have it in charge to open to their brethren in tribulation, those views and prospects, through which they may greatly rejoice, though now, for a season,

if

if need be, they are in heaviness, through manifold trials.

5. Teachers are profitable, as they spread and defend the doctrines of religion, and excite and cherish just sentiments of divine things. Many pious and devout thoughts arise from sermons, though too often they are little attended to, and not suitably improved. Were it not for line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little, such thoughts would seldom arise; and, through natural levity, and the impression of ten thousand vanities, they would be forgotten days without number. Who is so wise, so pious, so deeply and so thoroughly serious, whose understanding needs no farther degrees of light, nor his heart of warmth and affection? Till false reason and wanton ridicule cease to oppose the leading doctrines of Christianity, it cannot be idle or superfluous to state their evidence, and to unfold their excellence and importance. If thou believest the religion of Jesus, thou canst not esteem it a small matter, that, in sacred assemblies, the wavering are confirmed, doubts resolved, and the infidel is convinced, that Jesus was indeed no impostor, and no enthusiast, but truly what he claimed to be, the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. Whatever is wanting or amiss in our personal characters, or in our public ministrations, who are teachers of Christianity: truths of some influence on virtue and happiness are taught and proved, which would otherwise be unknown or forgotten, or make no deep impression on most men.

6. Pastoral instruction is a chief mean, which God hath appointed to rescue sinners from the ruins of their apostasy, and to interest them in his favour and friendship. The gospel is preached, to turn men from
darkness

darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the living God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them who are sanctified. It is the power of God unto salvation ; salvation from the guilt and punishment, and salvation from the power and dominion of sin, to every one who believeth. Men are born again to a spiritual, heavenly, and divine life, through incorruptible seed, even the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. Yonder sits a returned prodigal, who owes his own self to his faithful pastor. Without faith, without piety, without holiness, he walked in a vain shew, and was dead while he lived ; dead to every thing wise, and virtuous, and good. Relishing only the fleeting and transitory objects of sense, he neither discerned nor desired the things which are more excellent. Never reflecting that this life prepares for a happy, or a miserable eternity ; if passion and appetite were gratified, he remained easy and unconcerned, though a stranger to the covenants of promise, without Christ, and without God in the world. In an hour when he looked not for it, the threatenings of the law against sins, hitherto dear to him as a right hand or a right eye, are denounced from the pulpit. The arrows of conviction pierce his heart. Conscience awakes from her slumbers, accuses, condemns, torments him. Destruction from God becomes, in like manner, a terror to the drunkard and debauchee, sunk deep in the mire of vice ; to the unrighteous, cruel, and revengeful, rushing heedless on God's spear, and on the thick bosses of his buckler ; to the covetous, to the proud ; to him who knew to do good, and did it not ; to him who seemed to be religious, and bridled not his tongue ; to the hypocrite, to the self-righteous

righteous despiser of the Saviour. Anxious inquiries arise in their minds, How shall I escape devouring flames, and everlasting burnings! and, as sinners, they become sensible of their inability to help themselves, and of their unworthiness of divine help.—And now, to the soul thus thoroughly awakened, and deeply humbled, how beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good things, that publisheth salvation! How joyful the sound, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world! The faithful saying, that Christ came to save the very chief of sinners, is received as worthy of all acceptance. The Saviour, and, with him, abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, is offered. A believing, penitent, glad, and grateful heart, welcomes the offer. Wisdom calls, by her servants, on the simple, the scorner, and on the fool: Turn ye at my reproof; behold I will pour out my spirit upon you; I will make known my words unto you! Determined by grace, they hearken to the call. They look to the exalted Saviour, the author and finisher of faith. They look not in vain. He works in them, while hearing the word, a work of faith with power. He gives them repentance and remission of sins. Faith, under the influence of the Word and Spirit, purifies their heart; enables them to overcome the world's flatteries and frowns; works by love to God, to Christ, to their fellow-men, to their fellow-Christians, and animates their resolutions for the performance of every duty. Their temper and conduct is changed. Nourished by the words of faith and sound doctrine, they count all God's commandments concerning all things to be right, and hate every false and wicked way. Their
light

light so shines before men, that others seeing their good works, glorify their heavenly Father. They hear the Word behind them, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; when in danger of turning aside to the right hand, or to the left. Thus, the servant of God is warned, and escapes many a snare. When indolent, he is roused to activity; when fearful, encouraged; when ready to stumble, kept from falling. He goes from strength to strength, while appearing before the Lord in Zion; for there he learns what God the Lord will speak. In the days of health and prosperity, he hears for the time to come. On a bed of languishing, the Spirit brings all things to his remembrance: he holds fast the beginning of his confidence firm to the end; and an entrance is thus ministered to him abundantly to God's heavenly kingdom. So great and glorious are the consequences of the gospel, preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Nay, sometimes, they reach far beyond those who sit under the instructions of a faithful pastor. He proves the spiritual father of a sensible, studious youth, who afterwards serves God in the gospel, and carries on the work he had begun, with even more abundant success: or of men, whose wealth, talents, and connexions in life, render them extensive blessings to church or state.

And now, I appeal to your understandings and to your hearts, my respectable hearers. Instructions must be profitable, which, by the blessing of God, remove or prevent the most dreadful misery, and secure the most valuable enjoyments. And this is the case, when the guilty, hearkening to the gospel call, find pardon
through

through the blood of Jesus, acceptance through his merits, and sanctification by his Spirit; when the wicked forsakes his way, and the unrighteous his thoughts, and turns to the Lord; and when, through acknowledgement of the truth, those are recovered from the snare of the devil, who were formerly led captive by him at his will. Dreadful is his delusion, who thinks their life useless or wretched, who, waiting upon God in the way of his appointment, renew and exert their spiritual strength, and, if they cannot mount with wings as eagles, run and are not weary, or at least walk and are not faint. Is not the work of righteousness peace, and the effect thereof quietness and assurance for ever? Have they no dignity, who are men of another spirit, and, in religious and moral qualifications, more excellent than their neighbours? Does society gain little, when the wickedness of the wicked comes to an end, by the grace, not by the judgments, of God? Where is his benevolence, where is his heart, who feels no emotion of gladness, when his brethren are thus honourable and happy?

Condemn not, therefore, religious establishments, whether formed by individuals, united societies, or whole nations, which secure useful teachers, so far as human prudence can secure them, not to the present race only, but to future generations. Censure not the rulers, who devise wise and salutary plans, for thus promoting the best interests of mankind. Think not that they sin against their subjects, when, as nursing fathers or nursing mothers, they provide for them wholesome spiritual nourishment. Censure they indeed merit, who invade the sacred rights of conscience, and compel the reluctant to profess the national religion. But censure not those, who pity, and supply
with

with the means of instruction, multitudes, whom poverty would disable, or covetousness and inattention to a future world, indispose, to provide teachers for themselves, and who, without their friendly aid, would otherwise be destroyed for lack of knowledge. Boast not thy patriotism, or love to mankind, if thou dost, what in thee lies, to remove the chief restraints of wickedness, and to seal up the springs of private, of family, and of public happiness. If thou art zealous for light, improvement, and civilization, thy zeal for promoting them is not according to knowledge. If pretenders to liberality of sentiment, storm or undermine one religious establishment, and no other or better, of larger or lesser extent, replaces it; be not surprised that darkness covers the land, and thick darkness the people; that evil men and seducers wax worse and worse; that courteousness gives place to rudeness, gentleness to harshness, compassion to cruelty.

But, must it not be acknowledged, that congregations sometimes derive little or no benefit from sermons, and that to their teachers much of the blame belongs? It must be acknowledged. This, however, may be accounted for, in perfect consistency with what I have urged. Bad men regard the effect of what they preach with cold indifference, except in so far as worldly honour or interest is advanced by their seeming success; and efforts naturally are feeble and ineffectual, where desire is languid. If the drudgery of pulpit-work is dispatched, they are not solicitous what instructions, exhortations, and warnings, are most necessary and best calculated for doing good. Sometimes a clergyman's behaviour is not visibly in-

H

fluenced

fluenced by the doctrines and duties of religion. Men of small sagacity discern it, infer his craft and dissimulation, or conclude that they may imitate him without hazard. His well-composed discourse may indeed gratify the curious, and entertain the man of taste: but the force of his reasonings is blunted, by the evidence, at least by the suspicion, that he feels not that force.

The natural abilities, extent of knowledge, and persuasive talents, highly important in a teacher of religion, do not always accompany true piety. The dignity of a subject is not perceived, when it is dressed in mean and low language. A florid and pompous style, and subtile reasonings, which plain common sense cannot follow, generally make no impression: and, when the passions are addressed, without informing the judgment, impressions made on the people prove slight and superficial, and, as the morning cloud and early dew, quickly pass away.

But, are there not teachers of distinguished genius, learning, taste, and eloquence, who yet labour and spend their strength in vain? Perhaps, this is seldom the case, when they sincerely aim at the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, and preach the various truths and duties which God has appointed to be preached, as means of edification. Striking truths, when frequently and fervently inculcated, often command the attention, conquer prejudice, and have a powerful influence. Even when teachers neglect, arraign, or exhibit in a false light, the distinguishing doctrines of the blessed gospel; the lesser and occasional advantages of sermons are sometimes gained. The warm address of the speaker, and his fair and amiable character, constrain many to listen to his instructions:

structions : and the force of his arguments from other topics, may restrain gross immoralities, promote a decent deportment, and stimulate to acts of justice and beneficence. Let not this seem strange. Men, who never heard the gospel, or whose leading principles of action were never changed by its efficacy, have, notwithstanding, repressed particular vicious inclinations, and amended many things formerly amiss in their conduct. Though the word and Spirit of God, and these alone, can convert the soul from sin, eloquence may outwardly reform. What reformation may therefore be expected, when preachers provoke not the Spirit to withhold his blessing from their useful moral instructions, by shunning to declare the whole counsel of God, and keeping back from their hearers, truths the most profitable and necessary ?

Yes : Reformation, and something more than outward reformation, may then be expected. Happy, indeed, are they, whose eyes see their teachers, if their ears hear from them the faithful word, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it ! Not so, when any part of that word is kept out of view. All scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. It is therefore neither modest nor wise, to neglect any part of what is revealed as thus profitable. Neglects of this kind sometimes diminish, and sometimes destroy, the benefit of public instruction. God hath said, even with respect to prophets who ran un- sent, Jer. xxiii. 22. " If they had stood in my " counsel, and caused my people to hear my words ; " then they should have turned them from their evil " ways, and from the evil of their doings." Paul tells the Philippians, ch. i. 15, 18. " Some preach

H 2

" Christ,

“ Christ, even of envy and strife ; and some also of
“ good will. Notwithstanding, every way, whether
“ in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached ; and
“ therein I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” It
would therefore seem, that though their motive to
preach the gospel was the reverse of holy, and their
professed regard to Christ hypocritical, their sermons
were not useless. A glorious and happy change on
mens characters and conduct, is foretold as the conse-
quence of the preaching of the gospel, *Isaiah* *lv.* 10,
11. “ For, as the rain cometh down, and the snow
“ from heaven, and returneth not thither, but water-
“ eth the earth, and maketh it to bring forth and
“ bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread
“ to the eater ; so shall my word be, which goeth
“ forth out of my mouth : it shall not return un-
“ to me void ; but it shall accomplish that which I
“ please ; and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto
“ I sent it.” Every part of revelation, whether read
or heard, has its distinct use. The strict precepts,
and awful sanctions of the law, endear the Saviour to
sinners. The glad tidings of salvation are often, to
the convinced and humbled, the ministration of the
Spirit, and of life : and, when a temper and conduct
becoming sound doctrine, are inculcated, Christians
are thereby excited to adorn the doctrine of God their
Saviour in all things.—But, if pride, forgetting that
the gospel is a divine report, not a human invention,
courts applause, by pretending new discoveries in re-
ligion ; if it diminishes, enlarges, or alters the sacred
directory, and accommodates it to the fashionable
taste, or to popular humours ; the perfection of that
directory is denied, and its energy blunted. If inge-
nuity arrogantly and absurdly endeavours to improve

a revelation, which can make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good thought, word, and work; the Spirit will not honour fancy and folly, for awakening the conscience, enlightening the understanding, or purifying the heart. God will not transfer his blessing, from that word which he hath magnified above all his name, to schemes for attaining his favour, different from, nay, inconsistent with, that plan, which Infinite Wisdom hath chalked out in the sacred oracles. One, thinking of his own understanding more highly than he ought to think, pronounces certain doctrines of revelation useless or pernicious. Another, in his discourses on the leading facts and duties of Christianity, forgets to unfold them in the plain and clear language of scripture, which the poor and illiterate, as far as is necessary for them, may easily understand; and vainly hopes, by the aids of genius, philosophy, and criticism, to enable his hearers fully to comprehend the mysteries of faith. A third, through that fear of man which bringeth a snare, disguises his conviction, holds the truth in unrighteousness, and handles the word of God deceitfully. He, who, in the study of nature, attends more to experiments, than to plausible theories destitute of their support; in studying the bible, adopts an opposite plan, and overlooks the proof from experience, that the doctrines and duties on which the scripture lays the greatest stress, have in fact conducted most to the holiness and to the happiness of mankind. Not a few, blinded by prejudice, teach error from real conviction. Yet, though they are sincere, error doth not, and cannot, operate as truth. None are brought to look to Christ for salvation, by hearing that the doctrines of his deity and a-

tonement are absurd, and that, by repentance and amendment of life, they can save themselves. Prayer for divine influences is not excited, by declaiming against all expectation of, or reliance upon them, as fanaticism. It is remarkable, that religion and moral virtue flourish or decay, in proportion as doctrines, which pretended modern reformers pronounce corruptions of Christianity, are esteemed or disregarded. All the words of God are pure, those not excepted against which many have discovered the greatest spite, by persecution, by ridicule, or by misrepresentation. Thou, therefore, who desirest to do good, by instructing thy fellow men, despise none of the instructions of God. In recommending the belief of truth, or the practice of duty, go as far, but no farther, than the Bible goes. Add not to God's words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. Christianity, like the first man, came from the hands of God, pure and perfect. By every change, every subtle and refined interpretation, it is corrupted and debased.

Even necessary doctrines are sometimes taught, and necessary duties recommended, in language so incautious, as to excite prejudices in the hearers against other doctrines or duties equally necessary. Decency of conduct and social virtues, may be so inculcated, that the hearers may forget that religion requires a great deal more, even love, love to God, to the Mediator, to the divine law, to our fellow-Christians, to all men, enemies not excepted, flowing from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Holiness of heart and life may be so enforced, that men may view it as their title to God's favour; and thus, going about to establish their own righteousness, may not submit themselves to the righteousness of Christ. Jus-

tification

tification through the blood and merits of Christ may be so taught, that the impressions may be weakened of the necessity of that holiness, without which we can neither serve nor enjoy God, and of those good works by which our heavenly Father is glorified. The obligations of duty may be so explained, that men may lose sight of their natural depravity, and need of divine influence. The Calvinist may so speak of man's inability, and the Arminian of the frailty of his nature, that transgressors may conclude, that their performing duties, and avoiding criminal indulgences, are naturally impossible, or at least are the consequence of a frailty, for which they were not to blame, and on account of which they cannot, without cruelty or injustice, be punished.

Counsels equally necessary at all times, are the most important, and should be the most frequent subjects of sermons. Yet counsels peculiarly adapted to the times, have their importance, and the withholding them may diminish our usefulness. In this dangerous crisis, when without are fightings, and within are fears, men should be excited to turn to Him who threatens to smite, and to seek the Lord with the whole heart. Personal reformation should be exhibited, as necessary for national reformation, and for preventing national ruin. Isaiah's warning should be inculcated, that they fast in vain, who undo not the heavy burden, (and surely the burden of negro slaves is heavy), and who turn not away their foot from the Sabbath, from doing their pleasure on God's holy day. When political opinions spread, seducing subjects to undermine, under pretence of improving, an excellent constitution, and to rebel against their rightful sovereign, because they see not the wisdom of certain measures of government,

we ought, occasionally, to exhibit scripture principles and precepts, which demonstrate the falsehood of such opinions, and the guilt and danger of such practices. When some, with zeal, oppose the scripture doctrines of the Trinity, the atonement of Christ, justification through his merits, and the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, we, who believe the truth and importance of these doctrines, should defend them with equal zeal. Perhaps we see a probability of dangers yet remote, overlooked by those who only take a superficial glance of the present posture of affairs, without considering tendencies, whose operation, though slow, is certain. It may not be amiss in this case to speak, that our people may hear for the time to come. In a neighbouring country, a destructive despotism for more than a century, has at last produced the miseries of anarchy: and a corrupt absurd religion has betrayed many into scepticism and infidelity, and some into downright atheism. One with half an eye may perceive, that too many in other countries, seem fond to renounce the religious and political creed of their fathers, though they have not the same excuse for despising or hating them, and cannot point out, what evil either of them have done. But, are no evils to be dreaded, from mens changing good principles for bad ones, or for total want of principle, except those which immediately ensue? Is there no danger, that, when nations have deeply felt the baneful consequences of anarchy and irreligion, they may fly for shelter to the opposite extremes of tyranny in the state, despotism in the church, implicit faith, idolatry, and superstition? and are measures to be adopted, which, though perhaps their aim is directly opposite, from the impetuosity with which multitudes often rush from one ex-

treme

treme to another, may at length issue in so dreadful a catastrophe?

To conclude—The usefulness of public teachers of Christianity, doth not infer the usefulness of teaching doctrines or precepts falsely dignified with that name: yet, as he who offends not in word is a perfect man, where the most essential and necessary articles of Christianity are inculcated, they will prove the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth, though much hay and stubble may be built on the true foundation, and though often little wisdom may appear in the arrangement or style of discourses, in the choice of particular subjects, or in the degree of stress laid upon them. Still, however, the grace of God is no apology for the neglects or rashness of public teachers,

CHARGE TO THE MINISTER.

Reverend and Dear Sir,

Permit me to mention a few things, which may contribute to the usefulness of your instructions, though, from acquaintance with you, I am convinced that you know them, and are established in their truth.

Let the duties of an office, so beneficial both to pastors and people, command your utmost attention and diligence. Count them an honour and delight, not a mean drudgery, or an irksome task. Let it be your meat and drink to do the will of your heavenly Father, and to finish his work.

Take heed to your temper, disposition, principles, and springs of action. Covetousness, ambition, indolence, and love of pleasure, cool zeal, and weaken efforts in the service of Jesus. Piety and devotion, humility,

mility, disinterestedness and self-government, courteousness, benevolence and compassion, render every effort he makes agreeable to the teacher : and the native unaffected indications of those amiable qualities, conciliate affection and esteem, and render his labours acceptable. Expect not, however, to be acceptable to those, against whose errors and crimes you boldly testify, and who hold them fast, and will not let them go. Yet, preach the preaching which God bids you, though hatred and evil report should be the consequence. If you please men, if you make a point of doing it, if you do it by flattering their pride or profligacy, or falling in with their favourite prejudices, you cannot be the servant of Christ. The applause of some cannot be purchased, but at the expence of faith and of a good conscience. Holding fast your integrity, and refusing to let it go, may often expose you to slander. One may pronounce you a Pharisaic formalist, when you warn against enthusiasm. Another may stigmatize you as an enemy to reason, when you teach doctrines which it did not discover, and which it cannot comprehend. When you speak of fellowship with God, and inculcate the religion of the heart, a third will reproach you as a fanatic. A fourth will style you a methodist, and arraign you as righteous overmuch, when you caution against conformity to the world in fashionable follies and vices. Some will conclude, that you are no true patriot, no sincere friend to the people, if you put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates. If you scruple to accommodate your instructions and practice to the taste and manners of the times ; if you rebuke a lukewarm spirit, and are zealous for what others oppose or despise : wonder not that

they

they slander you as arrogant, turbulent, and stubborn. In these circumstances, be not overawed by men, blind to truth and to moral excellence; but, regardless of their censures, speak as duty demands, deal honestly with their consciences, and tell them plainly the fatal consequences of impenitence and unbelief. Grow in grace, advance in the divine life; and your heart, steel-ed and fortified by what the world can neither give nor take away, shall not sink or recoil, though ignorance or malice, on account of your faithfulness, dart against you the arrows of bitter words.

Yet, beware of giving an advantage to those who may seek occasion of reproaching you, by prying as a busy body into other mens temporal concerns, by behaviour imprudent, though not criminal, or by venturing to the utmost borders of what is allowable. While you seize every favourable opportunity for cementing differences, imitate your master, who, in disputes about property, declined acting as a judge or a divider. That may be lawful, which is not expedient, which edifies not, which is not lovely and of good report. Abstain from all appearance of evil. In matters indifferent, become all things to all men, that you may gain the more. Disgust none at religion, by a gloomy moroseness. Yet, let not complaisance and affability betray you to levities unworthy the dignity of your office, far less to soothing and flattering any, by your seeming approbation, in their vices or self-confidence.—Employ the greatest and best part of your time, in the duties of your office, or in preparation for these duties. Let not unnecessary amusements, or unprofitable visits, encroach on hours which ought to be devoted to nobler purposes. Think it not much, if, in seeking the profit of many, that they

they may be saved, you find it expedient to deny yourself, what, in another situation, you might innocently enjoy. Intense application to study or labour, seldom interrupted by relaxation, is, I acknowledge, a weariness to the flesh. Yet so are often the exertions of the peasant, the shepherd, the sailor, the soldier. Complain not, therefore, if the labours of your honourable office, wear out, a little sooner, your strength and vigour. After all, one whose temper is active and cheerful, and who enjoys the comforts of religion, may, from motives of piety and benevolence, study and labour with diligence, and deny himself many things otherwise agreeable, and yet not shorten his days. When a profession suits the genius and inclination, though the fatigues of it return every day, men are generally most easy and happy, when most employed. He ill consults his honour, comfort, and usefulness, who forgets, that, next to his salvation, the duties of his calling are his chief business, and who, whenever an opportunity offers, unbends and amuses himself with the toys and vanities of life. When, in almost every rank and order, religion and virtue lamentably decline, it is time, in our master's cause, to double our vigour, and strain every nerve, rather than to relax diligence, and abate the ardour of zeal. An opposite conduct, indeed, bids fairer for gratifying men. But it is neither wise nor pious, to gratify men, at the risk of offending God.

Till your blessed Master call you from your services, give attendance to reading, as well as to exhortation and doctrine. Meditate on divine things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all. Cultivate and improve your talents, in as far as duties higher, and more immediately necessary, allow.

allow. Keep in remembrance every branch of knowledge, which may promote your usefulness as a public teacher. Despise not materials for instruction, from the volumes of nature and of providence, the knowledge of the world, and acquaintance with your own heart. But, let the sacred oracles be your chief study. Enter as far as possible into their meaning, design, and spirit, that, as a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, you may bring out of your treasures, things new and old.

Let the subjects of your sermons be important, suited to the occasions on which you preach, and calculated, according to the opinions, characters, and situations of your hearers, to remove their prejudices, correct their errors, and rectify what is wrong in their temper and conduct.—When you have chosen a text, ascertain the meaning of it from the scope of the inspired writer, and the sense in which he generally uses particular expressions. It argues either poverty of genius, or culpable inattention, when preachers wander from the particular subject of their text, to some common-place dissertation, which would equally suit a hundred other passages of scripture, if discoursed in that manner.

Pay peculiar attention to the lambs of the flock. Sow the seed of knowledge when the soil is comparatively soft, and there are fewer thorns to check its growth. Your labour will be less pleasant, and probably less successful, when an enemy hath sown tares, or when, for want of culture, the field is overgrown with weeds.

Form connexions with the wise, the benevolent, the pious. Yet, call no man master, and depend on no human authority. Often lift up your eyes to your heavenly

heavenly father, to fill you with treasures of knowledge and of grace, to direct and assist you in your studies and labours, and to crown them with success.

Let earnest prayers for the down-pouring of the Spirit on your hearers, precede and follow your sermons. If the rain of divine influence is restrained, though you could preach with the zeal of a Paul, or the eloquence of an Apollos, none of the wicked would understand, and return, and live.

Preach the word; be instant, in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke; exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. Administer reproof with tenderness, delicacy, and meekness, yet, when necessary to give it force, with plain and undisguised freedom. Remember, however, that there are times and places, when wisdom forbids your rebuking a hard-hearted scorner, lest, when you give that which is holy to dogs, and cast your pearls before swine, they trample them under foot, and return and rent you. Though your dispositions, talents, and ministerial services, have found favourable acceptance with those, whose sentiments you justly value, be not high-minded. Often reflect, that you have nothing which you have not received; and that it is a little thing to be judged of man's judgment. Never lose sight of those imperfections and defects, which, though others cannot, you can discern in yourself; and pray, with a great prophet and prince, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: "What I know not, teach thou me."

You have begun well: Hold on to the end, with persevering and increasing diligence, and be not discouraged by the difficulties of your work. Take heed to thyself and to thy doctrine; continue in them; for, in so doing, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear

hear thee. You serve a kind and compassionate Master, who knows your frame, who remembers you are but dust, whose grace is sufficient for you, and who can perfect strength in your weakness. When you fear lest you labour in vain, he can surprise you with unexpected success; and he hath promised, "They that be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." Watch, therefore, as one who must give an account of the precious gospel committed to you, and of the precious souls entrusted to your care. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory, which fadeth not away.

You have the honour to descend from two ministers of Perth, and one of St Cuthberts^a. May you be justly loved and esteemed, as they were, for the amiableness of your temper, the exemplariness of your life, and your diligence in the pastoral office! May the Lord be with you, as he was with your fathers; and may you have many for your crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord!

CHARGE TO THE PEOPLE.

Respect the pastoral office. The dispositions and talents of some invested with it, may entitle them to no high measure of personal esteem: and the best of our order give many indications of human infirmity. But, it is not on that account just, it is not pious, to despise and ridicule an institution of heaven, from which

^a Mr Thomas Black and Mr David Black, ministers of Perth, and Mr Niel Macvicar of St Cuthberts.

which society and individuals derive such advantage: nor is it humane and candid to undervalue a pastor, who studies to show himself approved to God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of life. The wise and the good refuse not honour to a worthy magistrate or judge, though some judges and magistrates have acted unworthily. In an imperfect world, a state or a church is on the brink of ruin, when those orders are despised or hated, which prevent their becoming more imperfect.

Treat your minister with the kindness and courtesy to which his office and character justly entitle him, and contribute what you can to the lightening of his burdens. Our honourable magistrates have generously provided for the outward support of the pastors of this city. I ask not, therefore, for your pastor, your silver or gold: I ask, what I am confident he values more, your unfeigned affection, your gratitude for his labours, your rejoicing in his joys, your sorrowing for his griefs, and your improving by his instructions.

Lay no snares for him. Put far from you a malicious pleasure, in discovering and proclaiming his defects. View not his conduct with a suspicious eye, and paint it not to others in odious colours. Judge and speak of him with good nature and discretion. If the son of slander arraigns the soundness of his principles, or the strictness of his morals, or, if the wanton wit tells a ludicrous anecdote, to make him appear ridiculous; with the watchfulness of friendship, guard his reputation from those rude and ungenerous attacks, and, at least, let your angry countenance drive away the backbiting tongue. It is no proof of a virtuous enlightened age, that unsupported accusations, against upright and conscientious teachers, are so often
rashly

rashly received. Be not therefore credulous, when passion and party spirit, unsummoned, sift themselves as witnesses. They see with jaundiced eyes; they hear what was never spoken, and they tell what was never done. The simple believe every word, and thus, without designing it, gratify and encourage malignity, envy, and hatred of truth and holiness. It were well, however, for many a worthy character, if those who will not be candid and discreet, would at least speak the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and, in their favourite tales of obloquy, would add no aggravating, and omit no alleviating circumstance.

Neglect not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is. Say not, that you have no time for hearing sermons; unless you can plead, that worldly business or amusements are more necessary, than flying from the wrath to come, and laying hold on eternal life; and unless you certainly know, that in no future season, bitter and despairing remorse shall be your portion, for the days now spent in idleness, vanity, dissipation, and the forgetfulness of God, and Christ, and eternity. Rather say to your families and friends, Let us go up to the house of the Lord, and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths. Let such religious motives bring you to church, not a desire to be entertained with refined speculations, or charmed with the beauties of eloquence. Though curiosity is gratified, the imagination pleased, and the passions raised; what shall this avail you, if your behaviour is not reformed, nor your springs and principles of action changed?

Give earnest heed to the things which you hear, lest at any time you let them slip. The fervent and faithful teacher well merits serious attention. It is deemed

a breach of civility and polished manners, not to listen to one, who addresses you with solemnity and good sense. It is impious, thus to treat an embassador of heaven, whose instructions tend to make you wise, and holy, and happy.

Your teacher, however, claims not a blind and implicit faith. It is your duty to search the scriptures diligently, and to examine whether his interpretations of them are well or ill founded. Weigh what he says in the balance of the sanctuary; and look up to God, to give you understanding in all things. Think not that I trespass against modesty, in soliciting this return for the warmth, the plainness, the force of argument, with which, I trust, he shall preach to you.

Comply with his friendly counsels, as far as you find them agreeable to reason and revelation. Let him not run in vain, and labour in vain. He who travels in the dark, through narrow paths, surrounded with dangerous pits or precipices, welcomes an able and honest guide. Profit, therefore, by his instructions, whose duty, and whose inclination it is, to teach you the good and the right way. Examine your true state and character; consider the duties and dangers of your particular situation; and apply to these, the instructions he delivers. Imagine not, that he sounds a false alarm; and ascribe not his warnings to want of feeling and of benevolence: if, in imitation of his Master, he exhort you, to fear him, who can destroy your soul and body in hell, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched. While he preaches no other things, than the apostles and prophets have written, receive the word which you hear from him, as the word, not of men, but of the living God: for he who despises, what is spoken from the pulpit agreeably

Dis
gre
who
ther
who
plyi
God
ven.
Set
are
prov
prov
the
tor
up
dren
hear
live;
nant,
Ye
ken
who,
his
the
worth
Your
moiste
death
to do,
princip
getting
dom?
Mr
Dr Robe
of Edinb

greedably to the sacred oracles, despises the Spirit³, by whom these oracles were inspired. Consider not, therefore, his sermons as advice, which, though they who choose, do well to follow; others, who find complying with it inconvenient, are at liberty to reject. God, in a preached gospel, speaketh to you from heaven. See, that you refuse not him who speaketh. Set your heart to the things that are spoken, for they are not a vain thing, but your life. If the gospel prove not to you a favour of life unto life, it will prove more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for you. Give your pastor the joy of observing the seed he sows, springing up to eternal life, and of seeing you, and your children, walking in the truth. Incline your ears, and hear; come to the Redeemer, and your souls shall live; and he will make with you an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David.

Ye, who think ye are only entering on life, harken to the word of exhortation from an old man, who, from yonder gallery, often heard, in the days of his youth, the important instructions delivered from the pulpit where he now stands, by two judicious and worthy ministers, whose memory is dear to him. Your breasts are now full of milk, and your bones moistened with marrow. Yet, life may be short, and death near. Whatever, therefore, your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and, with all thy getting, get understanding. If you ask, what is wisdom? I reply, in the words of an ancient book, perhaps

I 2

haps

^a Mr William Robertson, father of the late Dr Robertson, and Dr Robert Hamilton, afterwards Professor of Divinity in the college of Edinburgh.

haps the ancientest extant, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and, to depart from evil, that is understanding. To-day, while it is called to-day, hear Christ's voice. He, who says, I will hear at a more convenient season, and refuses now to be reconciled to God, may suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Ye, who hope you have received the truth in the love thereof, beware, lest, being led aside by the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness. Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. Take heed to yourselves, and keep your souls diligently, lest you forget the things you hear, and lest they depart out of your hearts. Hide them not from your children, that the generation to come may know them, even the children which shall be born; who shall arise and declare them to their children, that they also may set their hope in God, and not forget his works, but keep his commandments. Let constancy in the sanctification of the Sabbath, and in secret and family religious exercises, water the seed sown. Avoid whatever would check its growth, particularly that multiplicity and hurry of business, or frequency even in innocent amusements, which extinguish desire for religious contemplation, or engross the hours which might have been thus employed. Motives to holiness, have small influence, when impressions of them are slight and superficial. Truths seldom considered, cannot suitably affect. Suffer, at no time, corrupt communication to proceed out of your mouths. Often, with your families, and your familiar friends, let your conversation be good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers. By circumspect lives, and the exemplary performance

performance of social and relative duties, adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour.

The time of your minister is precious; and, encroaching too much upon it, would be an imprudent expression of your esteem and love. Yet, let not this hinder your applying to one, in whose friendship and prudence you may justly confide, for advice and consolation in your spiritual doubts and distresses.

Finally, brethren, pray for your pastor and his fellow-labourers, that they may preach the law and the gospel in their native simplicity, and that the word of the Lord may have a free course, and be glorified.

May the Lord guide you continually; and may your souls be like a watered garden, and a spring of water whose waters fail not.

DISCOURSE IV.

IN TWO PARTS.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE,

Preached in the New Gray Friars Church, 18th June, and
25th June, 1758.

2 COR. ii. 10.

WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?

PART I.

THESE are the words of Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, and they express his lively apprehensions of the dignity of the gospel, the importance of its success, and the difficulty of preaching it aright. And if he, who was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, felt so deep a sense of his insufficiency for that arduous work; surely, it would be presumption in any ordinary gospel-minister, to deem himself sufficient. I have therefore made choice of these words, to correct the mistakes of such who account the labours of our office easy and inconsiderable, and to excite your prayers, that, seeing we are of ourselves insufficient for them, our sufficiency may be of God. For this purpose, let us first take a survey of the numerous and important duties of the pastoral office, and then consider the temptations from within, and opposition from without,

out, which may probably arise, to divert us from the due discharge of them.

I. I shall briefly survey some of the many and important duties of the pastoral office.—And I begin with public preaching, the duty to which my text immediately relates, and on which the scripture insists most, and lays the greatest stress; so that, when this and other ministerial duties interfere, this, as the most important and most extensively useful, should be preferred.

Christ crucified, and salvation through him; the law, as a schoolmaster, to bring men to Christ; and exhorting the disciples of Jesus to adorn his doctrine, by the conscientious performance of every duty; ought to be the chief subjects of our sermons. A comprehensive knowledge of Christian faith and practice, and an ability to read and understand the scriptures in the languages in which they were originally writ, are highly important, if we would be ready scribes, instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, and, like unto a man that is an householder, able to bring out of our treasures things new and old. Inspiration and miraculous gifts are now ceased; and therefore much time must be spent in reading and meditation, in order to attain such knowledge. And yet, our utmost diligence and application poorly qualify us for rightly expounding the sacred oracles, unless, through divine teachings, we imbibe the sentiments and spirit of their inspired penmen. Nay, an union of speculative and experimental knowledge, though necessary, is not sufficient to qualify for preaching usefully. Knowledge is one thing; and a faculty of imparting it to others,

others, and of improving it for their benefit, is quite another.

Great skill is requisite to explain the sublime mysteries of our holy faith, to unfold their mutual connections and dependencies, and so to demonstrate their certainty, that the sincere lover of truth may be convinced, and even the captious silenced. Great penetration is requisite, to search the secret foldings of the understanding and heart; to trace the various sources of error and vice; and, when we have detected them, neither, by overlooking the reasonings of infidels and profligates, to give them a handle for boasting that they are unanswerable; nor, by mentioning them without necessity, or weakly answering them, to betray the cause we mean to defend.

Our task, however, would be comparatively easy, were men lovers of truth and holiness, and sincerely disposed to hearken to the voice of sober reason, rather than to the clamorous demands of headstrong appetite. But many are the very reverse of this. Corrupt affections have a full ascendant over them. The gospel is an enemy to these corrupt affections; and therefore, they are enemies to the gospel. Our business is, to persuade such to hate and renounce, what is their chief delight; to engage them in a course of life to which they are strongly averse; nay, to prevail with them, to accuse, judge, and condemn themselves. The advocate pleads with success; because he pleads against those, for whom the judge has no particular affection, and with whom he is no how connected. But often the minister pleads against that, which is dearer to the judge than a right hand or a right eye. And what justice can be expected, when the judge is

also

also the party, and the cause in which men are to pass sentence is their own?

Add to all this, that the genius, spiritual condition, and outward circumstances of our hearers, are various; and a manner of address, proper for some, would be very improper for others. The secure must be alarmed, the ignorant enlightened, the wounded in spirit led to the Physician of souls, the tempted fortified against temptation, the doubting resolved, the weak strengthened, the backslider reclaimed, and the mourner in Zion comforted. Even those truths, which are the common nourishment of all, must be differently dressed and seasoned. Ministers are debtors to the wise and to the unwise, to the young and to the old, to the bond and to the free. But, how difficult is it to discharge that debt, and, as wise and faithful stewards, to distribute to every one his portion of food in due season! Little pains may serve to display criticism and literature on subjects which do not need them, or without occasion to plunge so deep in abstract philosophical speculations, that the bulk of an audience shall lose sight of us. But it is incomparably more difficult, to compose a popular discourse in a style plain, elegant, nervous, grave and animated; neither bombast nor groveling; neither scrupulously exact, nor fordidly negligent. Humble prayers, and much preparation, is necessary for that edifying strain of preaching, where the sentiments natively flow from the subject, and are all solid, useful, and calculated to strike; where every head, and every thing said by way of enlargement, is ranged in its proper order; and where the turn of thought and expression is scriptural and devout, natural and unaffected, sweet and insinuating, tender and affectionate. I say nothing of committing

committing a discourse to memory, and of pronouncing it with suitable warmth, solemnity, and distinctness. Hardly can it be hoped, that so many different excellencies should be found united in one preacher. It were well, if none, put in trust with the gospel, wanted qualifications the most essential. But, even in these, we are often greatly defective. Nor is this any cause of wonder. The door to the sacred office is opened ere the judgment is ripe, opinions sufficiently formed, and the fire and thoughtlessness of youth fully evaporated. Our scheme of divinity has not acquired a proper degree of consistency, a small proportion of time having been employed in studying it, and that not always in the wisest manner. Hence, we have shallow superficial views of the doctrines and duties in which we should instruct others; and, wanting distinct extensive ideas of a subject, we content ourselves to skim over the surface of it, disguising poor insipid thoughts with the charms of expression and pronunciation.

I hope you are now convinced, that if preaching was our only work, it would be no easy task to preach with that dignity which becomes discourses spoken in the name of God, and on subjects of the highest importance. It is equally difficult to lead the devotions of a numerous congregation, and, in their name, as well as our own, to plead and wrestle with God, for the blessings suited to their respective necessities. I pass over dispensing the sacraments, and the other public duties of our office.

But our services are not confined to the pulpit, or to closet preparation for it. It is one important branch of our work, to instruct and catechise the young and ignorant in the first principles of religion, seeing, with-

out

out this knowledge, the heart cannot be good. If childhood and youth are left to their natural ignorance and vanity, manhood and old age will be generally unprofitable; and sermons, however excellent, will prove of little service, because they cannot be understood without the previous knowledge of these first principles of religion. Christ has therefore solemnly enjoined us to feed his lambs. We are bound to nourish up children in the words of faith, and of sound doctrine; and experience shews, that plain and short questions and answers are the most effectual way of gradually instilling religious instruction into tender minds. We must feed them with milk, and not with strong meat, which, as yet, they are unable to bear: not discouraging them, at their first outset, by obliging them to learn a multitude of words they in no degree understand; but adapting ourselves to the weakness of their capacity, beginning with the history of the Bible, the more necessary articles of our holy faith, and the plainer and more general precepts of Christian morals. Haughty looks, or an angry tone, may increase their aversion to what is serious, and make them eager to get rid of us: but an insinuating and agreeable manner, may gain their esteem and affection, and make religion appear to them venerable and lovely. Familiar comparisons, examples from history, and appeals to conscience, must often illustrate and enforce these instructions. To impress all on their minds, tedious as it may seem, at one time the same sentiments, and even words, must be repeated over and over again, and at other times the same sentiment presented in various points of light, that the young learner may not mistake our meaning, or remain unaffected. Would we teach
knowledge,

knowledge, and make to understand doctrine them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts; precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little, II. xxviii. 9, 10. For doing all this, prudence, gravity, condescension, meekness, patience, are requisite. Perhaps, all things weighed, it is more difficult to catechise, than to preach well. It might greatly promote the interests of religion, if men of eminent piety and abilities were set apart to give themselves wholly to this important work, for which the other duties of ministers leave them too little, or no leisure. Meantime, inability to do what could be wished, excuses us not from doing what we can: the rather, that, next to public preaching, there is no method in which we can be so eminently and extensively useful.

Parochial visitation, if managed in a way easy to plan, I will not say easy to execute, would be equally useful. But a formal visit once in a year, with a short prayer, and a few general advices, is, I am afraid, a bodily exercise which profiteth little. It is a weariness to the flesh, of small service to the great ends of our office, unless as it affords some opportunity to gain the affection of those entrusted to our care; and this it will hardly do, if we do not carry our connexion and intercourse with them beyond these formalities, gladly lending them our friendly aid, when it may any how advance their spiritual welfare, and, in such cases, not overlooking even the meanest and poorest of our people. The discovering a pure disinterested affection, a sincere desire to oblige, and a good stock of discretion, candour and charity, encourages them to openness to us their spiritual joys and griefs, to ask

our

our counsel in their perplexities, and freely to impart to us their doubts and objections against religion. Thus we may learn their various circumstances, and instruct, exhort, reprove, and comfort them accordingly. Sermons, like arrows shot at a venture, seldom hit the mark; when we know not the character of our hearers; and, in many instances, our knowledge of their character must be imperfect, if we contract no familiarity with them. Yet this, however desirable, is next to impossible, in a numerous charge, or in a charge almost continually shifting its inhabitants. Though this may be one cause why religion seldom flourishes in populous cities, yet ministers ought not to be blamed for not doing what they have no strength or leisure to do. Public duties, which at once promote the good of many, are to be preferred to private duties, which promote the good of a few families or individuals. Much good, however, might be done even by civil visits, could we learn the art of being grave without affectation, and cheerful without levity; never leaving a company, without dropping something to render them wiser or better.

There are, however, circumstances, in which our visits are peculiarly seasonable. Sometimes, when families are favoured with signal mercies and deliverances, our advice may restrain their joy within proper bounds, remind them of the precarious nature of temporal comforts, and excite a thankful sense, and a suitable improvement of God's goodness. But our visits bid fairest to be acceptable, and, if wisely improved, useful too, when God brings upon a family afflictive providences, or when the Lord maketh the heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth it. The mind is then more susceptible of serious impressions, and
hearkens,

hearkens, with avidity, to what, in the day of prosperity, was despised. Yet, so various are the outward troubles and inward distresses of mankind, that, almost every day, we meet with cases wholly new to us, and which we are quite at a loss how to manage. So opposite, too, are the opinions and tempers of people in distress, that, what is best calculated to strike one, makes not the least impression on another; and, what is necessary to rouse one from security, would sink another in despair. Security, however, is the more common and dangerous extreme; and, too great indulgence, has worse consequences than too great severity. They therefore mistake it greatly, who send for ministers on a deathbed, only to speak to them the language of comfort, and to pray for mercy to their souls. Promising pardon to those who feel not their spiritual maladies, is saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. But, men love to be flattered and deceived; and therefore, one's being much sent for by people of all characters, to visit the sick, is a presumption he has no great talent of rousing their consciences. After all, where the concerns of the soul have been neglected to a deathbed, it is to be feared, that such visits are oftener pernicious to the healthy, than profitable to the diseased. We ought not however to neglect them; because diseases, which wear the most threatening aspect, may not prove mortal; because the call of the gospel extends to every living man; and, because this, when prudently managed, is a proper opportunity to warn bystanders not to defer the work of conversion to so unfit a season.

Reconciling differences, is a work highly suitable to the character of ambassadors of the Prince of peace. Not that it becomes them to be judges and dividers in matters

matters of property ; but, when unhappy differences arise betwixt Christian friends, the pastors of a church should do their best timeously to cement them. I say, timeously ; for divisions, like diseases, when neglected in their first beginnings, become incurable ; and evil-minded people, who delight in sowing tares, or in watering them where already sown, will not be wanting to insinuate, that such an affront, or such a neglect, is insupportable : so that we cannot be too speedy in fortifying the parties at variance against these malicious artifices, provided we have got a firm hold of their esteem and confidence, and fully convinced them, we mean our advice for their mutual benefit. To conduct our friendly offices with success, we must beware of discovering partiality, by listening too favourably to one side of the question. When a superior is in the wrong, we must not diminish the respect due to his station, by saying so too bluntly in the presence of his inferior, but rather take him aside, and endeavour privately to convince him of his fault. Nor, when parties are together, ought we to suffer them to debate the cause of their differences. This would generally tend to widen the breach, and to embitter and chaff their spirits more than before. We should rather advise them to demean themselves as the disciples of Jesus, by forgetting and forgiving what is past.

In private reproof, what zeal for God, and what tender compassion for perishing souls, is needful, to overcome that aversion every good-natured man must feel to tell another he has done amiss, and which every wise man must feel, to offend or to distress those whose friendship he values ! what skill, to temper severity with mildness, and to proportion our censures to the

the degree of the fault, and to the character and circumstances of the offender! what prudence, to seize the properest season, and to choose the fittest manner, of administering this bitter medicine! what presence of mind, to detect the weakness of those pretences, by which the reprovèd would vindicate his conduct! Though we should argue weakly from the pulpit, we are in no danger of immediate open contradiction; but, when we reprove in private, pride is immediately at work, to spy out any fallacy in our reasoning, and to raise specious doubts and objections, which, if we cannot resolve, our labour is lost, and our rashness despised. In private endeavours to reclaim infidels, or those who err in the fundamental articles of faith, the difficulties are much the same; save that misguided conscience joins pride in making head against us, and thus renders our success more improbable. Readiness of thought, as well as extent of knowledge, are necessary, to refute the sophistical cavils of subtle adversaries, and to offer such arguments in support of truth, as shall leave no room for reply.—I shall not say much on the discipline and government of the Church. In many intangled, perplexing cases, that come before us, it is hard to know what measures ought to be preferred. But, it is much harder to conduct ourselves with such prudence and moderation, as to retain the esteem of those who differ from us, and yet, with such integrity, as to preserve the approbation of our own consciences.

There is another duty, incumbent on ministers as such, more difficult than any I have yet mentioned; and that is, to show themselves patterns of good works, Tit. ii. 7.; and to be examples to others, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith,

in

in purity, 1 Tim. iv. 12. The setting a good example, is not only a moral duty, incumbent on them in common with others, but seems given them in charge, as a part of their sacred office, and an instituted mean for saving of souls. Hence Paul enjoins Timothy, 1 Tim. iv. 16. "Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine; for, in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." A holy, exemplary behaviour, gives a force and energy to sermons, which learning, genius, and eloquence, could never have procured them. When a minister's life proves that he is in earnest, his admonitions strike with authority on the conscience, and sink deep into the heart: while the strongest reasonings against sin, have little effect, if hearers can apply the bitter proverb, Physician, heal thyself.

Ministers, as guides to their flock, should not only cautiously avoid what is in itself unlawful, but what, if practised by others, would prove to them a probable occasion of stumbling. Many things have no intrinsic evil, and yet are so near the confines of vice, that uncommon prudence is necessary to indulge in them without being defiled. As such prudence is extremely rare, ministers, ere they give any practice the sanction of their example, had need to examine, not only what is safe for them in particular, but what is safe for that flock of Christ, to which they ought to be patterns and guides. When travelling alone, we may choose the shortest and most convenient road, though it be somewhat slippery and dangerous, provided we are conscious we have prudence enough to guard against those dangers. But he must be a merciless and unfaithful guide, who, knowing that a number of weak thoughtless children would follow his

K

footsteps,

footsteps, should choose a path, safe to himself, but in which it was morally certain the greatest part of his followers would stumble and fall. This adds considerably to the difficulties of our office; not only as all restraints are, in their own nature, burdensome, but as it is often hard to resist the importunity of those, who traduce our caution, as a being righteous overmuch.

PART II.

IN a former discourse, I have presented to you a rude and imperfect draught of the duties of our function; to convince you, that the office of a bishop, though a good, is a difficult work. Justly did the pious Leighton observe, that even the best would have cause to faint and give over in it, were not our Lord the chief shepherd, were not all our sufficiency laid up in his rich fulness, and all our insufficiency covered in his gracious acceptance.

II. I shall now complete the argument, by considering the temptations and opposition which may probably arise to divert us from the right discharge of the duties of our office. Ministers, though bound to exemplary holiness, are men of like passions and infirmities with others, and equally exposed to be seduced by Satan, the world, and the flesh. The devil assaults the shepherd, that he may make the easier prey of the sheep; and he has many faithful agents, who enter fully into his malicious views, and lay snares for ministers, that, having them to quote as their patterns, they may excuse their own licentiousness, and silence their reprovers.

provers. Is a minister at an entertainment? they entice him to excessive mirth, to do as others, and not to affright men at religion, by stiffness and singularity. If they succeed, though openly they may applaud, yet secretly they despise and ridicule him, for acting so much out of character. That degree of solitude and retirement, which happily secures others from many temptations, is impossible to a minister, who takes heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made him overseer. His duty obliges him to converse with men of all stations and characters: with the infidel, the licentious, the debauchee; as well as the sober, the virtuous, the pious; and he often sees what it is improper for him to imitate. One heaps favours upon him, to pave the way for demands, which, without doing violence to the religious principle, he cannot comply with. Another would intimidate him from doing his duty, by threatening the loss of his friendship; and, rather than suffer for well-doing, he may be in danger of purchasing ease and prosperity, at the expence of honour and conscience. If he dares to defend the truth and importance of those doctrines, which are the peculiar glory of our holy religion, the persecution of tongues is what he cannot avoid. No personal virtue will atone for so unpardonable a crime. No evidence of learning, prudence, or moderation, will shelter from the odious name of bigot and enthusiast, which some, who affect to be valued for their candour and charity, so very liberally bestow; and there are many, who cannot bear to be despised and laughed at, even when sensible that the ridicule is ill-founded. In every place, briars and thorns are with us; and we dwell among scorpions. Nay, even good men,

through remaining darkness in their understandings, and corruptions in their hearts, may greatly hinder us in our Master's work ; and, by an excessive deference for them, we may be betrayed to forego our own judgment, and to act a part which will be bitterness to us in the latter end. Surely, then, we had need to take heed to our steps, and to watch, and pray, that we enter not into temptation.

But, our chief danger arises from indwelling corruption. Our office obliges us to preach and pray, on many occasions, when our frames are dull and languid. Hence, there is a danger, lest we grow accustomed to speak of God, and Christ, and eternity, without feeling the importance of what we speak, and realizing our own concern in it. If we fall into such a habit, the most striking truths, preached by ourselves or others, make no impression upon us ; and, that quick and powerful word, which ought to recover from deadness and formality, loses its power and energy. Thus, we go on from evil to worse ; have no relish for our work ; do as little in it as we possibly can, and do that little without spirit : drawing nigh to God with the mouth, and honouring him with the lip, while the heart is far from him. Ministers ought to be men of superior knowledge. But, too often, superior knowledge produces contempt of others, and puffeth up with pride and self-conceit. Pride inclines us stiffly to maintain an error we have once asserted, even in spite of the clearest evidence against it ; to compose sermons, with a view to our own honour, rather than the glory of God, and edification of souls ; and hence, to make an idle shew of learning, genius, or eloquence, which, though it pleases the ear, neither enlightens the understanding,

derstanding, nor affects the heart. Flattery greatly strengthens this self-conceit. When that intoxicating poison is artfully conveyed, few are entirely proof against it. Though persons applaud us, who are no competent judges, or whose heart is at variance with their lips, self-conceit regards their praise as sincere and well-founded.

If we escape this rock, the opposite extreme of discouragement, may have a fatal influence. Some, through too close application to study, contract unhappy disorders in their blood and spirits; and Satan takes the advantage of this, to raise a world of darkness and confusion in their minds; so that they are pressed out of measure, and ready to sink under their burden. God may write bitter things against us, and cause us to possess the iniquities of our youth. Possibly, some special opportunity of serving God, was afforded us, and neglected; or, as Solomon, we may have forsaken him, after he hath spoken to us twice. By this, the Comforter, which should comfort our souls, is provoked to withdraw, and to leave us, for a long season, in a languishing frame. Thus, we go mourning without the sun, our feet lame, our knees feeble, our hands hanging down. Performing any difficult duty, appears impossible; and, even the grasshopper is a burden.

After a series of years spent in vigorous endeavours to promote the cause of truth and holiness; ignorance, profanity, and contempt of the gospel, too often continue to prevail. From the pulpit, and in private, too, we address our hearers in the warmest manner: But we preach, and pray, and watch, and labour, in vain. He that was unclean, is unclean still; and he that was filthy, filthy still. We are ready to say,

Why exert ourselves thus to no purpose? why cultivate a soil, which, after our utmost care, remains barren? Hence, ministers, after laudable diligence in the first years of their ministry, are in danger of sparing themselves overmuch, and of doing little in the duties of their office, save what decency and character constrain them to do. The temptation gains additional force, when those, among whom we have faithfully laboured, fail in due gratitude and respect, and discover an eagerness to pick faults in our sermons, or private behaviour. Though we act with the purest intentions, every thing is taken by a wrong handle, and sure to displease. This froward, censorious spirit, our Lord beautifully describes, Luke vii. 31—35. Conscious that we merit better treatment, we sometimes peevishly take pet at the public; and, when we find they are resolved to blame even without cause, become less concerned to avoid just cause of censure.

Once more.—As we grow older, aversion to fatigue, and love of ease, grow upon us, and often lead us to neglect or delay our duty, when some motive stronger than indolence does not push us on to the discharge of it. Nay, indolence, feeble and languishing as it seems, often triumphs over the more violent passions; and, as it restrains bad men from much wickedness, so it hinders the servants of Christ from doing a deal of good, which they might, and ought to have done. It puts off till to-morrow, what had better been dispatched to-day. To study a subject to the bottom, and to compose with exactness, is such a fatigue, that if we have a certain readiness of expression, we are apt to get rid of it, and to venture into the pulpit with little preparation. It is hard to resist this bias,

to

to prosecute studies which, though necessary, are perhaps unpleasant ; to allow a suitable proportion of time to every different duty ; and resolutely to employ our precious hours to the best advantage. And when indolence, by long habit, has acquired force, the overcoming it is next to impossible.

Judge, my brethren, from the whole of what has been said, if the work of the ministry is so light and easy, as many, through ignorance or inadvertency, are apt to imagine. It is an honourable, but it is also a laborious and arduous service : and no man, by his own strength, is sufficient for it. How vain, then, and presumptuous, are such, who, depending on their natural abilities, hastily thrust themselves into the sacred office, without spending suitable time in preparatory studies, and without any eye to Christ, to assist, to accept, and to prosper their labours ! What can be expected, but that, being unlearned, and unstable, they should wrest the scripture to the destruction of themselves and others ? Even men of the most distinguished talents, and purest zeal, when they survey the extent and importance of their charge, and the strict account they must one day give of their stewardship, have cause, with Moses, exceedingly to quake and fear, and, with David, to plead, “ Enter not, “ O Lord, into judgment with thy servant ; for in thy “ fight, no flesh living shall be justified.” How dreadful, then, to engage in such work, without delight in it, fitness for it, or regard to its great end and design !

I know not, if any students of divinity, or young preachers, are now hearing me. If there are, I hope, they will receive what I have said with meekness and candour. As a sincere friend, I would warn them of rocks, some of which I myself have found dangerous.

If my heart deceived me not, my ends in entering into the ministry, were pure and disinterested. I have seen no cause to repent my choice of a profession. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth. I esteem it my honour and happiness, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. But I lament, that I entered on the sacred function, ere I had spent one fourth of the time, in reading, in meditation, and in devotional exercises, which would have been necessary, in any tolerable degree, to qualify me for it. I have made some feeble efforts to supply these defects. But, besides the public duties of my office, and a variety of unavoidable avocations; indolence of temper, the employing too much time in studies or labours less important, and other culpable causes, partly formerly hinted, partly needless or improper to be mentioned, have been considerable bars in the way of my success. Ye, who now enjoy the golden season of youth, be careful to improve it to better purposes. The advantages you now have for acquiring gifts and grace, may never return in any future period.

And now, you have heard the duties I owe to this numerous congregation, and the difficulties I have to surmount in the faithful discharge of them; I say, to this congregation; having neither leisure nor inclination, to do the office of a bishop in another's diocese, when there are souls in my own, more than enough for my care. The charge of all the souls in this large and populous city, is a yoke which the most vigorous minister in it would be unable to bear: and, as one minister cannot inspect every family, so, no one family can reasonably desire the inspection of every minister. It is ordinarily fit, that people should apply to those ministers,

ministers, in whose district they dwell, and to whose immediate inspection Providence has intrusted them. In this way, few, if any, will be wholly overlooked. But, if we pursue no regular plan, but leave it to chance, or to personal attachments, to determine our work; multitudes, who most need our assistance, will enjoy least of it, and others will engross a greater proportion of our time than ought to be allowed them. I therefore hope, my many friends and acquaintances in other congregations of this city, will forgive me for preferring a greater to a lesser good, and for employing my labours, where, through the blessing of God, I think they bid fairest to be useful.

If my relation to this congregation, forbids me, in ordinary cases, to alienate from them my ministerial services; much more does my relation to the Church in general, forbid me, needlessly to trifle away my time, or to employ it in a way foreign to my office. God has given me a charge, to meditate on divine things, and give myself wholly to them: and friends, and innocent recreations, must not claim those hours which ought to be consecrated to God and his people. I would say to friends, I would say to innocent recreations, as Nehemiah to Sanballat, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Neh. vi. 3. If the apostles thought it unreasonable to leave the word of God, in order to redress abuses committed in administering the alms of the church; shall we leave it for causes of a less worthy nature? Doubtless, it becomes us to employ what time we can spare, from the duties we owe to our own souls, to our families, to our congregations, in studies or labours, that may tend to the general

neral benefit of the church of God. This would afford us abundant work, though we were fixed in the smallest and most inconsiderable charges. But, though such services are often expected from ministers in this great city, and, though it must be owned, our situation procures some peculiar advantages for engaging in them; yet we must be singularly frugal of our time, if we would redeem any considerable proportion of it for those desirable ends.

But it is now time, briefly, to address my dear Christian friends and brethren in this congregation, of which, the spiritual oversight, through the providence of God, is committed to me. When I think on the many great and good men who have formerly filled this pulpit, and cast an eye on my own unworthiness and insufficiency, I cannot but tremble, that one so poorly qualified, is now called to the same work. When I review my defects and miscarriages, when exercising the sacred office in two charges comparatively easy, and, in the last of which, I had the aid of an affectionate and faithful fellow-labourer^a; I am ready to say, If I have run with the footmen, and they have wearied me, how shall I run with the chariots? and if, in the day of prosperity, wherein I trusted, my heart fainted, what shall I do in the swellings of Jordan? I am called to enter upon labours, and to encounter difficulties, hitherto unknown to me. My task is, my vigour is not, increased. I am with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, lest I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you, such as ye would not. Struck with the disproportion between my strength,

^a The late Mr Robert Rolland at Culrofs.

strength, and the difficulties of this important charge, I must bespeak your candour and indulgence : and yet, weak as I am, and feeble as my endeavours are, they may tend to our mutual salvation, through your prayers, and the supply of the Spirit of Christ. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me, in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe ; that my ministerial services in this city may be accepted of the faints ; and that, to you in particular, I may come with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed ; Rom. xv. 30—32. Send up your warmest addresses to the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, that his grace may be sufficient for me, and his strength perfected in my weakness : that in my closet, he would enable me to incline my ear to wisdom, and to apply my heart to understanding ; yea, to cry after knowledge, and lift up my voice for understanding ; to seek her as silver, and to search for her as for hid treasures : that in the pulpit, and in the more private duties of my office, he would touch my cold heart, and faltering lips, with a live coal from his altar, and give me the tongue of the learned, to speak words in season to every soul : that the law of truth may be in my mouth, and no iniquity found in my lips : that I may walk with God in peace and equity, and turn many away from iniquity. Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified ; and that we may be delivered from wicked and unreasonable men ; for all men have not faith ; 2 Thess. iii. 1, 2. Pray always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit ; and watch thereto, with all perseverance and

and supplication for all faints ; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel ; Eph. vi. 18, 19. Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord, in ceasing to pray for you : but I will teach you, through divine strength, the good and the right way. For my friends and brethren's sake, I will now say, Peace be within you ; and because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. I conclude with the prayer of the psalmist, Ps. li. 9.—13th & 15th verses ; “ Hide thy
“ face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.
“ Create in me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a
“ right spirit within me. Cast me not away from
“ thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
“ Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and up-
“ hold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach
“ transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be convert-
“ ed unto thee. O Lord, open thou my lips, and
“ my mouth shall show forth thy praise.”

DIS.

DISCOURSE V.

IN TWO PARTS.

MOTIVES FOR HEARING SERMONS.

Preached in the New Gray Friars Church, 2d and 9th July, 1758, and afterwards, with some alterations and additions, at the opening of Lady Glenorchy's Chapel.

PROV. viii. 33, 34.

HEAR INSTRUCTION, AND BE WISE, AND REFUSE IT NOT. BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT HEARETH ME, WATCHING DAILY AT MY GATES, WAITING AT THE POSTS OF MY DOORS.

PART I.

CONTEMPT of God's Sabbaths, and disregard of ministerial instruction, are melancholy characteristics of the age in which we live. That day, which the Sovereign of the universe hath peculiarly set apart for receiving the homage of his subjects, and for dispensing to them the blessings of his grace, is employed, by many, in transacting worldly business, and is trifled away by more, in gadding abroad in the fields, in parties of pleasure, and in paying or receiving unprofitable visits. Men of this cast, though sometimes they may be found in the house of God, would deem it a reproach on their understandings, should you imagine religion had brought them thither. Their behaviour, when present in worshipping assemblies, sometimes more fully

fully indicates their contempt, than even absence from them could do. They affect an air of heedless indifference; they gaze around them, to observe the looks and fashions of others; and they esteem it a worthy and notable achievement, if they can catch at any thing in a sermon which may afford occasion of ridicule, or if, by their own ludicrous looks, words or gestures, they can disturb the devotion, and spoil the gravity of more serious hearers. There are others, whom regard to character, and possibly some remains of a natural conscience, restrain from such profligate politeness. But sacred time lies heavy upon their hands. They say of the Sabbath, What a weariness is it! and, as for the word of God, in it they have no pleasure. Any, the most trifling incident, is greedily seized by them, and pled as sufficient excuse for absence from God's courts. They hate the light, and are unwilling to come to it, lest their deeds be reproved. Secretly conscious of the doubtfulness of their state, they dread to go where they may be told the worst of it; and, to avoid the pain of thoroughly knowing their disease, and of submitting to a cure, they suffer the disease to continue and increase, until at length it becomes utterly incurable.

Such reflections abundantly justify my addressing you from the words now read: "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." He, who, in this chapter, is termed Wisdom, even Jesus, in whom are all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, demands from the sons of men, that they listen with reverence, and submit with cheerfulness, to his heavenly instructions. Though his personal ministry was confined to one age
and

and nation, yet, by the sacred oracles, by gospel ministers, by his providence, and by his Spirit, he even now speaketh to us from heaven. My present work is, to inculcate the necessary duty of hearkening to the instructions delivered in his name, and agreeably to his will, by gospel ministers, in those solemn assemblies which are here styled the Gates of Wisdom, and the posts of her doors. Such a gate, through the good providence of God, is opened, in the place where we are met together this day. Here, many in opulent or easy circumstances, may be conveniently accommodated with the means of grace : and many of the poor of the people, may have free access to religious instruction, who hitherto have been in a great measure, or altogether, destitute of that advantage.

When I speak of hearing religious instruction as a necessary duty, I mean, that it is necessary when men have opportunity for it. When persecution deprives of public instruction, and when sickness, or other afflictive providences detain from it, this is our misfortune, not our crime ; and if we abound so much the more in private and in secret duties, God can abundantly compensate that loss, and give us songs in our nights of adversity, even as in the day when a holy solemnity was kept. Blessed be God, neither of these is your case. Gospel ministers are allowed to preach the kingdom of God, and to teach those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding them. And the rod of God does not confine you to a bed of languishing. You have liberty, you have strength to go with the multitude, to go with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, yea, with a multitude that keep holiday. If the fault is not your own, your eyes may see
your

your teachers, and your ears may hear the word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Slight and misimprove not these privileges, lest God be provoked to take them away. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.

That by the blessing of God I may excite you to this duty, I shall, in the *first* place, consider the tendency of preaching and hearing the word, to promote our best interest: *2dly*, I shall prove, that hearing the word is enjoined by express divine authority: and, *3dly*, I shall lay before you, the dreadful threatenings, which have been denounced and executed against those who refuse to hear the word, and the precious blessings which have been promised to, and actually bestowed upon, the faithful preachers, and the conscientious hearers of God's word.

I. I return to the first of these. If preaching and hearing the word, wanted the sanction of any positive precept, their evident tendency to improve you in useful knowledge, and in good dispositions of heart, and thus to promote your best interest, is argument sufficient to enforce the duty recommended in my text.

The sacred oracles, my brethren, are an inestimable blessing. They are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: nay, they are able to make us perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good thought, word, and work. The doctrines revealed in them, are not doubtful speculations, or light and trivial matters; but truths of infallible certainty, of the most sublime and excellent nature, and, to us men, of infinite importance. Human literature, valuable as it is, may be cultivated or neglected

neglected at pleasure. But ignorance of the way of life, can neither be innocent nor safe: for, on our knowing, choosing, and walking in that way, our usefulness and comfort in this world depends, and our happiness in the world to come.

Possibly, you will ask me, What does this arguing reprove? Are not the more weighty matters of the law and of the gospel plain and obvious to the meanest capacities? Is it not possible, by private study and meditation, without the assistance of sermons, to understand all in the sacred oracles needful to be understood? Do not some of us already know as much, or more, than our pastors? and, if so, how preposterous is it to go to church, to be taught by them?—These are the sentiments of many. Whether they favour most of solid reason, or of arrogant self-confidence, is easily determined. Reading the scriptures, without understanding them, can profit no man. Every man ought to ask himself, as Philip did the eunuch, Understandest thou what thou readest? and, I am afraid, many may adopt the eunuch's answer, How can I, except some man should guide me? Some are of weak understandings, and cannot take in the knowledge of divine things, unless represented in the most easy and familiar manner. Some have treacherous memories, and soon forget what they read. Others have wanted the benefit of religious education, and, since they came to years, their time and thoughts have been so much engrossed by the cares of a family, that they have paid small attention to the study of divine things. Was it only in pity to those classes of men, to whom, they must allow, that helps and assistances in religion are indispensably necessary, the greatest proficients in knowledge ought, by their example, to excite others

to attend upon a preached gospel. For, when the illiterate observe public religious instruction despised, or at least neglected, by men of acknowledged genius and abilities, they likewise will absent themselves from it, that they may appear men of enlarged minds, who know all that is fit for them, and are too wise to be taught by a minister. This is a way of distinguishing themselves from the herd of mankind, cheap and easy, suitable to every corruption in the human heart, and in which neither talents, nor application, nor integrity, are requisite. But I insist not on this. The learned, as well as illiterate, need to go to church on their own account. None, in this imperfect state, arrive at such extent and exactness of Christian knowledge, as to need no farther assistance for knowing more. Even the most enlarged and exalted minds, find it difficult to view every various doctrine and duty, in its proper order and connexion. For wise reasons, the Bible was not written in a systematic form. The instruction it imports concerning the several branches of faith and practice, is scattered up and down in different passages; many of which would be overlooked by the bulk of mankind, if some were not employed to collect and explain them. He, therefore, who commands us to search the scriptures, doth implicitly command us to use, in that search, the fittest and most effectual means in our power. Now, what can be better suited to assist us in the attainment of religious knowledge, than the discourses of those, who have not only made it their chief business to study the sacred oracles, and the language, sentiments, and manners of those to whom they were first delivered, but who, by cultivating their rational powers, have acquired a facility of forming distinct conceptions of things,

things, and of expressing those conceptions with plainness and propriety? Let us suppose that the capacities of men are originally equal; still, they will bid fairest for eminent degrees of knowledge, who are not diverted from the pursuit of it by secular employments, and whose charge it is to give attendance to reading, as well as to exhortation and doctrine, yea, who are solemnly enjoined to meditate on divine things, and give themselves wholly to them, that their profiting may appear unto all men. Do men of competent abilities, for your sakes, devote the greatest part of their time to religious inquiries; and, while teaching you the will of the Lord, do they study to be taught it themselves more perfectly? and yet, are you so mightily conceited of your own wisdom, as to expect nothing from their pulpit instructions that can merit your attention? If so, permit me to remind you, that confidence is often retained by folly and ignorance, while modesty attends upon true wisdom, and a well furnished mind. The best know only in part; and he who feels no defects in his knowledge, knoweth nothing as he ought to know.

After all, knowledge, however extensive, if it hath no suitable influence on mens hearts and lives, will profit them nothing: and, in a land of gospel light, more people are undone, for want of considering what is their interest, than for want of the speculative knowledge of it. All profess to believe themselves mortal. Few are properly affected by this acknowledged truth. Our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked; our imaginations vain; our passions impetuous; the sollicitations of sense importunate; the temptations of Satan subtil; and our worldly avocations and allurements innumerable. On all these accounts, we need

a faithful monitor, to awaken in us a practical sense of danger and of duty. The wisest and the best, through remaining depravity, must have their pure minds frequently stirred up by way of remembrance: otherwise, their devout affections will flag and cool, and their good impressions abate and languish. Timothy, from a child, had known the holy scriptures; had heard from Paul a form of sound words; was honoured with the important office of an evangelist; and, to fit him for discharging it, was endued with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit: and yet, even Timothy, needed to be put in mind of one of the most essential articles of our holy religion. "Remember," says Paul to him, "that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to my gospel," 2 Tim. ii. 8. No wonder, then, that the apostles judged it necessary, to inculcate over and over again, the grand truths of the gospel, even when addressing those who already knew them. I would entreat such, who plead their knowledge as an excuse for not hearing sermons, to consider attentively the sentiments of Paul and of Peter, as expressed in the three following scriptures. Rom. xv. 14, 15. "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written to you more largely, putting you in mind." Phil. iii. 1. "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but to you it is safe." 2 Pet. i. 12. "Wherefore, I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and be established in the present truth." Ministers, therefore, who bring nothing new to the pulpit,

pulpit, may prove eminent blessings, by strengthening convictions, and producing a livelier relish of known truths. The wise and faithful preacher seeks to find out not only words of truth, but acceptable words, which, while they convince the understanding, may also make deep and lasting impressions on the heart, alarming our fears, encouraging our hopes, engaging our love, and animating our resolutions. And, doubtless, the sounding God's message into the ears of men, with becoming solemnity, vehemence, and concern, has something in it more piercing and efficacious, than the mere solitary reading the Bible often has. I might easily illustrate and strengthen these reasonings, by a detail of facts. The early, and almost universal corruption of religion in the heathen world, and the frequent revolts of the Jewish church to the idolatries of neighbouring nations, were chiefly owing to the want of regular provision for public religious instruction. For, after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, when in almost every town and village synagogues were erected, where the scripture was read and explained every Sabbath day, the Jews adhered to the law of Moses, with a strictness and nicety not to be paralleled in history. So sensible was Julian the Apostate how wise an institution preaching was, for promoting the knowledge and practice of religion, that he appointed men to preach moral philosophy, and to harangue publicly, in defence of heathenism: and, without doubt, if any thing would have supported Paganism, and stopped the progress of Christianity, this would have done it. But as, formerly, the violence of persecution; so, now, the charms of eloquence and philosophy, were too feeble adversaries to the gospel of Christ. We trust, that such who now

oppose the faith of the gospel, and the power of godliness, whether by thin-spun metaphysical sophistry, by rhetorical declamations, by fly hints and innuendoes, or by insolent and ill-placed raillery, shall in the issue succeed no better. In the mean time, when, from the press and from the stage; when, in taverns, in coffeehouses, and in almost every place of public resort, ministers of Satan are every day exerting their utmost zeal and address, to discourage others from walking in the good ways of God: one would think, it could not seem evil in the eyes of any who wish well to religion, that, one day in seven, some are employed publicly to recommend it. Then, it will be time enough for us, who preach in favour of faith and holiness, to keep silence, when infidels and the profane shall renounce the hellish and ignoble office of preaching against them.

II. I am next to prove, that hearing the word of God is enjoined by express divine authority.

Under the Old Testament dispensation, one office of the priests and Levites was, to expound the sacred oracles. They not only read in the law of God, but gave the sense, and caused the people to understand the reading; and they joined to their explications, such advices or encouragements as they judged necessary. Of all this we have a clear instance, Neh. viii. 7—11. “The people were bound to attend, and to regard these instructions.” Deut. xxiv. 8. “Thou shalt observe diligently to do according to all that the priests and Levites shall teach.” Hag. ii. 11. “Thus saith the Lord, Ask now the priests concerning the law.” Mal. ii. 7. “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should

“ should ask the law at his mouth ; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.” But as these ordinary preachers too often departed out of the way, God was pleased to preserve the knowledge, and to inculcate the practice of his law, by extraordinary messengers, who, though secured by inspiration from error, yet, as to style and method, seem to have been usually left to their own genius, that their diligence in seeking out, and setting in order useful instructions, might be a pattern to ordinary teachers. I need only appeal, for proof of this, to the case of Solomon, Eccl. xii. 9—11. “ And moreover, because the preacher was “ wise, he still taught the people knowledge ; yea, he “ gave good heed, and sought out and set in order “ many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out “ acceptable words ; and that which was written was “ upright, even words of truth. The words of the “ wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.”

When the synagogue worship commenced, I will not determine. I think it probable that it was, from the earliest antiquity, ordained by God himself, as a necessary means of preserving religion in those parts of Judea which were remote from the metropolis ; that soon after Solomon's reign, it fell into desuetude ; and that the evident bad effects of this neglect, in the growth of ignorance and idolatry, occasioned the revival of this useful ordinance by Ezra and Nehemiah ^a. That the synagogue worship was instituted by men under

L 4

der

^a See Prov. viii. 33, 34. Acts xv. 21. Lev. xxiii. 3. Pl. lxxiv. 8. Philo, l. 3. De vita Mosi, p. 685. Josephus, l. 2. contra Appian, p. 1072 ; and the Talmudists in Bav. Kam. fol. 82. ; and Megilla Hieros, fol. 75. col. 1.

der the guidance of the Blessed Spirit, we may safely conclude, from our Lord's honouring it with his presence. It seems to have been a general usage in these assemblies, that, after reading the law and the prophets, doctors, fitted for that office by education, or by supernatural gifts, interpreted and enforced what had been read. That this was the usage in the synagogue at Nazareth, we learn from Luke iv. 16—27. There we find, that our Lord first reads a prophecy from the Old Testament; next explains the meaning of it, and points out the event to which it refers; and concludes with cautioning his countrymen against rejecting his heavenly instructions, and against vainly hoping that birth and outward advantages would give them any claim to God's favour, which was dispensed in a way unfathomable to creatures, and often denied to those, who, to the human eye, appeared to bid fairest for it. We have much the same account of the synagogue at Thessalonica, Acts xvii. 2, 3. "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Paul opened unto them the meaning of scriptures, laid down propositions, and supported these propositions by convincing evidence.

Was all this incumbent on priests, and scribes, and prophets, during the Jewish dispensation: and can we suppose, that, under a more excellent and spiritual dispensation, the Church is deprived of this blessing? No, my brethren. The ascended Redeemer hath commissioned pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying

edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ^b. A gospel ministry is necessary, while the Church remains imperfect in faith, in holiness, and in comfort. Our Lord, therefore, hath specified the qualifications requisite for that office; assigned their proper work to those engaged in it; provided for their subsistence; and obliged those under their care, to suitable returns of affection and duty. And, was all this to invest them with no higher office, than that of public readers of the scripture? Is a task, of which a child may be capable, the labouring in word and doctrine, which renders worthy of double honour, and for which, faithfulness, and ability to teach, are required? Is nothing more intended by that awful charge; "Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine ^c?" Timothy was enjoined ^d, "Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Bishops are enjoined ^e, to "hold fast the faithful word, as they have been taught, that they may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince gainfayers." Titus was enjoined ^f, to "speak the things which became sound doctrine; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned." Such solemn cautions against performing their work amiss, would have been absurd and ridiculous, if addressed to men

^b Eph. iv. 11—13. ^c 2 Tim. iv. 2. ^d 1 Tim. iv. 16. ^e 2 Tim. ii. 15.

^f Tit. i. 9. ^g Tit. ii. 1, 7, 8.

men whose only work was, the reading or repeating the oracles of the Holy Ghost.

God, therefore, hath set apart a peculiar order of men, to explain the sacred oracles, to feed his people with knowledge and understanding, and to beseech sinners, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. This is their charge; and wo unto them, if they neglect it.—But why this solemn charge to preach the word, if men have a licence, to hear, or not to hear it, as they please? If gospel ministers are bound, for the good of others, to attend continually on the different duties of their function; surely others are bound, for their own good, to attend their public instructions, in the proper season. We cannot succeed in our commission as Christ's ambassadors, where we are denied an audience: nor can we persuade, by the terrors of the law, or allure, by the comforts of the gospel, if, when we display them, men keep out of our way. If these are foolish builders, who hear the word of God, and do it not; they cannot be wise builders, who will not even hear it. If ground, where the seed perishes, proves unfruitful, how can ground, that never received the seed, bring forth fruit?

The attending public worshipping assemblies, was prescribed to the primitive Christians, by the highest authority. They were commanded, Heb. x. 25., not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some was. I might appeal to Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others, as evidences, that, in these Christian assemblies, preaching and hearing the word was one principal exercise. But it is unnecessary, as the fact is sufficiently clear from the New Testament itself; and an apostolical tradition of unquestionable validity in this case, claims our regard. We
have

have a comprehensive, though short account, of the primitive worship, Acts, ii. 47. "They continued "stedfastly in the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, "and in breaking of bread, and in prayer." And it is observed, Acts, xx. 7. that "upon the first day "of the week, when the disciples came together to "break bread, Paul preached unto them."

Our Lord cautions his disciples ^ε, "Take heed how "ye hear." If hearing the word is unnecessary; if men are at liberty to do, or to forbear it, as humour or inclination chance to prompt them, the manner of hearing must be of small importance, and that caution might have been safely spared. Our Lord's directions about fasting, prayer, and giving of alms, imply, that none of these can be innocently neglected. For the same reason, therefore, the caution, "Take heed how you hear," must imply, that hearing the word is not left indifferent.

A famine of the word of God, through the silencing or removing of faithful teachers, is represented by scripture prophets as a heavy judgment ^h. "And "I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy "mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be "to them a reprover, for they are a rebellious house." "i Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that "I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of "bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the "words of the Lord; and they shall wander from "sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; "they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the "Lord, and they shall not find it. In that day shall "the fair virgins and the young men faint for thirst." "j I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove "thy

^ε Luke viii. 18.

^h Ezek. iii. 26.

ⁱ Amos viii. 11, 12, 13.

^j Rev. ii. 5.

“ thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” If their circumstances are thus wretched, who have no access to hear the gospel, must not those be reckoned the enemies and murderers of their own souls, who have access to hear it, but who put it far from them? and, in a creature endued with reason, can such madness ever be innocent?

PART II.

III. I now proceed to lay before you, the dreadful threatenings which have been denounced and executed, against those who refuse to hear God’s word, and the precious blessings which have been promised to, and actually bestowed upon, the faithful preachers, and the conscientious hearers of it.

God hath denounced his wrath in the most awful and tremendous language, against those who will not hearken to the messages of his grace. “^k Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then they shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own

^k Prov. i, 24—31.

“ own way, and be filled with their own devices.”
 “ ¹ The man that wandereth out of the way of under-
 “ standing, shall remain in the congregation of the
 “ dead.” “ ^m He that turneth away his ear from
 “ hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomina-
 “ tion.” “ ⁿ Whosoever shall not receive you, nor
 “ hear your words ; when you depart out of that house
 “ or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily, I say
 “ unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and
 “ Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that
 “ city.” “ ^o If the word spoken by angels was sted-
 “ fast, and every transgression and disobedience re-
 “ ceived a just recompence of reward ; how shall we
 “ escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at
 “ the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was
 “ confirmed unto us by them that heard him ?”
 “ ^p He that despised Moses’s law, died without mercy
 “ under two or three witnesses : of how much forer
 “ punishment, suppose ye, shall he be counted worthy,
 “ who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and
 “ hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith
 “ he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done
 “ despite unto the Spirit of grace ?” “ ^q See that you
 “ refuse not him that speaketh ; for if they escaped
 “ not, who refused him that spoke on earth, much
 “ more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him
 “ that speaketh from heaven.”

As hearing the word of God, is one branch of that
 homage we pay to him in public worshipping assem-
 blies, it would not be improper, did time allow, to
 repeat some of the threatenings in scripture against the
 neglectors of public worship. I shall, however, only
 mention

¹ Prov. xxi. 16.

^m Prov xxviii. 9.

ⁿ Math. x. 14.

^o Heb. ii. 2, 3.

^p Heb. x. 28, 29.

^q Heb. xii. 25.

mention that prophecy, Zech. xiv. 17—19. ; “ And
“ it shall be, that whoſo will not come up of all the
“ families of the earth unto Jeruſalem to worſhip the
“ King, the Lord of hoſts, even upon them ſhall be
“ no rain : and if the family of Egypt go not up,
“ and come not, that have no rain, there ſhall be the
“ plague wherewith the Lord ſhall ſmite the heathen,
“ that come not up to keep the feaſt of tabernacles.
“ This ſhall be the puniſhment of Egypt, and the
“ puniſhment of all nations, that come not up to keep
“ the feaſt of tabernacles.” The plain meaning of
the prophecy I take to be this :—The rain of di-
vine influence ſhall be denied to thoſe, who perſiſt
in deſpiſing God’s word, and in neglecting public or-
dinances. They deprive themſelves of thoſe means,
which, through God’s bleſſing, melt and ſoften the
hearts of others ; and hence, the plague of increaſed
blindneſs of mind, and hardneſs of heart, becomes their
portion. The maſter of a family doth not ſend meat
through every corner of the houſe, to each particular
member of his family, but calls them together to one
common table, and there giveth to every one, his
due portion of food. The ſoul doth not animate the
members of the body, when cut off and ſeparated
one from another, but when joined and united toge-
ther. Thus it is with the influences of the holy Spi-
rit. Indeed, he denieth them not to the ſincere Chri-
ſtian, in his ſecret retirements. But, it is in the
houſe of God, he is more peculiarly preſent. If we
ſeek him not there, when we have opportunity for it ;
ſooner, or later, our ſouls ſhall ſmart for that negli-
gence. The impotent man, if he had not waited at
the pool, for the deſcent of the angel that troubled
the waters, might have remained impotent ſtill. In
like

like manner, there is ground to fear, that such will pine away and perish in their spiritual diseases, who refuse to wait at the pool of ordinances, until the Spirit descend, and put healing virtue into the waters of the sanctuary.

The threatenings which God hath denounced against those who refuse to hear his word, are not empty bugbears. God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Every age affords instances of temporal and spiritual judgements, actually inflicted in consequence of these threatenings; and, eternity will manifest, that all those were, to multitudes, the beginning of never-ending sorrows. I shall only refer you to two passages of scripture. The first is an instance of temporal judgments; the second, of spiritual. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15—17. “The Lord God
“ of their fathers, sent to them by his messengers,
“ rising up betimes, and sending, because he had
“ compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place:
“ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets; until
“ the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till
“ there was no remedy. Therefore, he brought upon
“ them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their
“ young men with the sword, in the house of their
“ sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man
“ or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age;
“ he gave them all into his hand.”—Ps. lxxxvi. 11,
12. “But my people would not hearken to my voice,
“ and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up
“ unto their own hearts lusts; and they walked in
“ their own counsels.”—If this was the doom of Judea,

dea, for despising God's law ; what may not Britain dread, for contempt of the gospel ?

But, with many of you, I would hope, gentler motives will prevail. With pleasure therefore, I change my voice, and remind the friends of Jesus, how expressly God hath promised his special presence and blessing to the faithful preaching and conscientious hearing of his word. “^r Turn you at my reproof : “ behold I will pour out my spirit unto you ; I will “ make known my words unto you.” “^s Incline “ your ear, and come unto me ; hear, and your soul “ shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant “ with you, even the sure mercies of David. For as “ the rain cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, “ and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, “ and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give “ seed to the sower, and bread to the eater ; so shall “ my word be, that goeth out of my mouth : it shall “ not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish “ that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing “ whereto I sent it.” “^t O that my people had “ hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my “ ways ! I should soon have subdued their enemies, “ and turned my hand against their adversaries. The “ haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves “ unto him : but their time should have endured for “ ever. He should have fed them also with the finest “ of the wheat : and with honey out of the rock I “ should have satisfied thee.” “^u In all places where “ I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I “ will bless thee.” “^v Jesus came, and spoke unto “ his disciples, saying, All power is given unto me in “ heaven

^r Prov. i. 23.

^u Ex. xx. 24.

^s Is. lv. 3, 10, 11.

^v Math. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

^t Ps. lxxxi. 13—16.

“ n

“ a

“ u

“ th

“ a

“ w

grac

vant

pres

are

chee

T

form

prec

the v

oppo

weal

God

dow

thou

it h

mer,

hath

Wie

and

pierc

spirit

of th

and

profa

phers

woun

“ Re

² He

“ heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach
“ all nations : and, lo, I am with you always, even
“ unto the end of the world.” “ ^w Behold I stand at
“ the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice,
“ and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup
“ with him, and he with me.” These are some of the
gracious words, on which God hath caused his ser-
vants to hope. Encouraged by them, let us regularly
present ourselves before God, to hear all things that
are commanded us of God, humbly claiming, and
cheerfully expecting, the promised blessing.

To support and strengthen our hopes, let us review
former accomplishments of these exceeding great and
precious promises. In how miraculous a manner hath
the word of God often triumphed over the greatest
opposition ! Though published by men, despised as
weak and feeble, it hath proved mighty, through
God, to the pulling down of strong holds, casting
down imaginations, and bringing into captivity every
thought to the obedience of Christ ^x. Like a fire,
it hath melted the frozen heart, and, like a ham-
mer, it hath broken in pieces the rock ^y. Nothing
hath been able to withstand this sword of the Spirit.
Wielded by his almighty arm, it hath become quick
and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword,
piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and
spirit, and discerning the inmost thoughts and intents
of the heart ^z. Young and old, high and low, rich
and poor, illiterate savages, abandoned debauchees,
profane scoffers, cruel persecutors, learned philoso-
phers, and refined moralists, have all felt its salutary
wounds, and have been led by it to seek and find re-

M

lief

^w Rev. iii. 20.^x 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.^y Jer. xxiii. 29.^z Heb. iv. 10.

lief in the compassionate Physician of souls. They, who were sometime darkness, have become light in the Lord. They, who were alienated from God in their hearts, and by wicked works, have learned from it the important lesson, of loving the Lord God, with all the heart and soul, and mind and strength. They, who were hateful, and hating one another, have been taught of God to love their neighbours as themselves. And they, who formerly trusted in themselves that they were righteous, are now, through the law, dead to the law, and count all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Yea, so mightily hath the word of God prevailed, that thousands have sometimes been converted by one sermon ^a. What a strong encouragement is this, to fervent prayer, for a return of such happy seasons! Awake, awake; put on strength, O arm of the Lord! awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old ^b. Open our hearts to receive instruction, as once thou openedst the heart of Lydia to attend to the things that were spoken by Paul. Of thy own blessed will, renew us by the word of truth: and may we all experience what it is to be born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, even the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

If, through regenerating grace, we have thus tasted that the Lord is gracious; as new born babes, we will desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby ^c. What was first the mean of imparting a spiritual and divine life, becomes also the mean of preserving, of strengthening, and of increasing it. Saints are nourished up by the words of faith, and of good doctrine ^d: and hence, they esteem the words of

God's

^a Acts ii. 41.

^b Is. li. 9.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3.

^d 1 Tim. iv. 6.

God's mouth, more than their necessary food ^e. In their greatest perplexities, it is a light to their feet, and a lamp to their paths ^f. It warns them of many dangers, delivers them from many snares, revives their languishing graces, supports their drooping hopes, and sweetens to them the bitterest cups of adversity. When the poor and needy seek water, and find none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, God, by a preached gospel, opens rivers in the wilderness, and streams in the desert ^g. He satiates the weary soul, and he replenishes every sorrowful soul ^h. A minister is directed to speak as appositely to a particular case, as if he had been told it, and had studied his sermon with a view to it. The seasonable, unexpected relief, fills the Christian with holy wonder and gratitude; and he is ready to address his minister, as David did Abigail—"Blessed be thou of the Lord, and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to me ⁱ."

But, methinks I hear some serious Christian object, "Alas, I have long attended on sermons, and yet derived from them no such benefit. The precious ordinances I enjoy, rather increase my guilt here, and pave the way for aggravating my misery hereafter."—Possibly, my sorrowful friend, thy complaints are ill-grounded. There is, that maketh himself poor, and yet hath great riches. When hearing the voice of God's servants, was you never checked in a bad design, or excited to a good one? Was you never engaged, by it, to consider your ways, and turn your feet to God's testimonies? Tell me, when God said, Seek ye my face; did not thy heart echo back, Thy

M 2

face,

^e Job, xxiii. 12.^f Pl. cxix. 105.^g Is. xli. 17, 18.^h Jer. iii. 25.ⁱ 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

face, Lord God, will I seek. When the glories of the Redeemer were displayed, didst thou not feel the desires of thy soul going forth towards him, and towards the remembrance of his name? Despise not, O Christian, the day of small things. The fault is thine own, if it hath not proved a day of great things. If, with suitable faith, humility, and fervour, thou wouldst seek unto God, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; surely, even now, he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. Though thy beginnings were small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase ^j. In the diligent use of proper means, God, O ye lovers of his name, even your God, shall bless you. Though he seems to forget you, and, for a season, hideth his face from you; yet he will appoint you a time, and remember you. The dew of divine influence may then descend, when you expect it least. Ere you are aware, your souls may become as the chariots of a willing people. God knoweth the best and wisest time for bestowing this blessing: and, because he is a God of judgement, blessed are all they that wait for him ^k.

Thus I have finished what I proposed on this subject. Suffer me, my dear hearers, to remind you, that every one of you is concerned in what hath been said. Without faith, there is no salvation. Faith cometh by hearing; and men cannot believe on him, of whom they will not hear ^l. The messages of God's word are equally directed to high and low, to rich and poor. Greatness will be no shelter to wickedness. Vengeance will find out the offender under a robe of velvet, as easily as under a cover of rags. Though those of you, whom God hath exalted to superior sta-

tions,

^j Job viii. 5, 7.

^k Is. xxx. 18.

^l Rom. x. 14, 17.

tions, ought to be addressed with peculiar deference and respect, yet, even you, if saved at all, must be saved like other men; and therefore, like other men, are obliged to attend the ordinary means of salvation. If you refuse such attendance, you refuse it at your peril. When you are sick or wounded, nature makes no difference betwixt you and the meanest of your attendants. The nauseous medicines, and the painful operations, requisite for their recovery, are equally requisite for yours. As little doth grace treat you differently, in healing the diseases of your precious souls. Christ, in whose name we demand an audience, is infinitely more above the highest of you, than the highest of you are above the meanest of us. Your riches and honours, your strength and courage, shall not profit you in the day of wrath. If found despisers of the gospel, in spite of all these, you must be constrained to call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon you, and to hide you from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Your punishment shall be the more severe, as your example naturally tends to banish out of the world public worship. Your inferiors will be forward to copy after you in a matter so agreeable to their vicious inclinations, and will gladly rid themselves of these restraints of conscience, which, though you disregard, you could wish, for your own safety and interest, might retain their force over them. “Wo unto the world, because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come: but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh^m.”

You who are in poor and low circumstances, refuse not the word of exhortation. Though little ac-

M 3

counted

^m Math. xviii. 7.

counted of among men, you will not be overlooked or forgotten in the day of judgment. You, too, have souls, which must be happy or miserable for ever: and the less you enjoy in this world, the more should you aspire after the pleasures and glories of futurity. To the poor, as well as to the rich, the gospel is preached, and salvation is offered. Though you may not have leisure to attend week days sermons, yet God hath given you the Sabbath for sacred purposes. Though you cannot contribute for the support of a minister, or even purchase a seat in a church, provision is made, that your poverty shall not debar you, from enjoying in this place the glad tidings of salvation. If, then, you neglect to improve your privilege, and to hearken to God's message, you have no cloke for your sin; and, what you suffer in time, will prove to you the presage and forerunner of a miserable eternity.

To all of you, I would say, as Jotham, of old, to the men of Schechem, "Hearken unto me, that God may hearken unto you."^a Let my counsel, this day, be acceptable to you. See that you no longer deny a hearing to him, who, in a preached gospel, speaketh to you from heaven. It is true, we, who address you in God's stead, are formed out of the clay, so that our terror need not make you afraid. Nevertheless, we are ambassadors for Christ^o; and, however safely you may despise our persons, you cannot safely despise our Master, or our message. It is Christ that speaks to you by us; and, though God's servants meet not always with the best of usage, surely, with all reason, it might be expected, that men should reverence God's Son.—Methinks, the lover of Jesus cannot

^a Judg. ix, 7.^o 2 Cor. v. 20.

cannot but feel the melting force of this argument. I ask not, Will you despise him, who is the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person; and who claims it as his right, that all men should honour him as they honour the Father? I ask not, Is it wise, to refuse that regard to the Lord of the universe, who is able to save or to destroy, which you would readily pay to the message of an earthly potentate, though delivered you by the meanest of your fellow subjects? I choose not to awe you by authority. I would rather draw you by the cords of love. Can you reject him, who, for your sake, left the bosom of the Father, and voluntarily endured the most exquisite sufferings? Shall a little matter hinder you from attending the means of grace, when the pains of the cross, the terrors of death, the fury of hell, the curse of the law, and the wrath of God, could not hinder Jesus from purchasing for you these means?—Think not, that these exhortations are the ravings of fancy or enthusiasm. I speak the words of truth and soberness, and appeal to the Bible for what I say. What gave the Redeemer a claim to ascend up on high, and to receive gifts for men, and, among other gifts, the gift of a standing ministry? Was it not his previous humiliation and suffering? He first descended into the lower parts of the earth, that he might afterwards ascend far above all heavens, and fill all things. This we are expressly told, Eph. iv. 8—12. Under the Jewish dispensation, not only the people, but the book of the law, the tabernacle from whence God revealed himself, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, were sprinkled with blood; to intimate, that all discoveries, whether of duty or of mercy, are upon this ground, that a ransom is provided. It

was necessary that the patterns of the things in the heavens should be purified with these ; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. The New Testament church is indebted for the more glorious discoveries with which she is favoured, not to the blood of bulls or of goats, but to the precious blood of Christ. Thus the inspired author of the epistle to the Hebrews reasons, Heb. ix. 19—25. ; The Son of God must appear in the character of Redeemer ; and in that character he must obey and suffer, in order to abolish death, and to bring life and immortality to light through the gospel ^p. He must give himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word ^q. And can you slight a privilege, which he, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, purchased for you at so costly a rate ? Jesus was despised and rejected of men, that, by the knowledge of his obedience and sufferings, he might justify many. Shall he be despised and rejected still ? despised and rejected by those, for whose sake he was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted ? Does not, O Christian, a sacred indignation seize thee, at the mention of this ? Is it not the breathing of thy heart, Let him be exalted, who, for my sake, endured the cross, despising the shame ! May the pleasure of the Lord prosper in his hand ! May he see of the travel of his soul, and be satisfied !—Is the glory of the Redeemer thus dear to you ? I hope it is. Know, then, that preaching and hearing the word, are the chief means of extending the Redeemer's empire, and of advancing his honour. Faithful ministers are the glory of Christ ^r. The doctrine they preach is the chief mean of promoting his

^p 2 Tim. i. 10.^q Eph. v. 26.^r 2 Cor. viii. 25.

his glory : yea a mean, which would never fail of success, was it not, that the god of this world blinds the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine into them ^f. It is by the preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ, that all men see, what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. Nay, it is by this despised gospel, the objects it reveals, and the effects it produces, that, to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, is made known, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God ^t. Surely it well becomes us to adopt the resolution of the pious Jews, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, “ We will not forsake the house of our God ^u.” Hasten, O Lord, the happy days, when many people shall go and say, “ Come ye, and let us go up to the “ mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of “ Jacob ; and he shall teach us his ways, and we will “ walk in his paths ^v.”

^f 2 Cor. iv. 4. ^t Eph. iii. 8—10. ^u Neh. x. 39. ^v Is. ii. 3.

DISCOURSE VI.

IN THREE PARTS.

DIRECTIONS FOR HEARING SERMONS,

LUKE viii. 18.

TAKE HEED, THEREFORE, HOW YE HEAR,

PART I.

THE word of reconciliation, though, in its native tendency, a favour of life unto life, yet often proves, in the event, through mens faulty manner of hearing it, a favour of death unto death. Men may enjoy the brightest sunshine of gospel ordinances, and yet no divine light irradiate their understandings, no spiritual warmth enliven their hearts. Of this danger, the parable of the sower, in this chapter, gives us a lively and affecting picture. Often the good seed of the word falls on the way side, on stony ground, or among thorns. It is well, if a fourth part of it falls upon good ground, and brings forth fruit to perfection.—On some the word makes no impression: they hear it inattentively, or, if they attend, they quickly forget it.—In others, it awakens the conscience, moves the affections, and, perhaps, produces some temporary and partial reformation. But it takes no sure hold of them, and sinks not deep enough into the heart.

They

They have no root in themselves, no strength of mind, no firmness of resolution. Hence, they never hold fast faith and integrity, when it may anyhow endanger their secular interest.—Others can exert themselves with vigour, pursue a plan with steadiness, encounter difficulties with courage, and endure sufferings with patience: who yet do all this, only in seeking and serving the world, not in the service of God. For the meat that perisheth, they diligently labour: for the meat that endureth to eternal life, they faintly wish. Immoderate love of pleasure, or anxious carefulness how to provide for their families, stifles, in their breasts, every religious impression.—To one or other of these classes, the generality of hearers belongs. Few, in comparison, with a good and honest heart, hear the word and keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.—Our blessed Lord, fully sensible of all this, warns his disciples, as in the words of our text, “Take heed how ye hear.” Hear my divine instructions in a suitable and becoming manner, that they may not be lost upon you, and your souls lost for ever.—Doubtless, my brethren, many in this audience, need such an admonition; at least, as much, as they who first received it. It would not be unnecessary, though in holiness you equalled even the chief of the apostles; for, to the apostles, it was originally addressed. Permit me, therefore, to direct you, how you ought to hear the word, if you would wish to hear with profit, and to be to your ministers a joy, and a crown of rejoicing, in the day of the Lord: and let the counsel of one, who is under particular obligations to wish your welfare, be acceptable to you.

I. Hear

I. Hear the word, from right motives, and for right ends. Multitudes go to church, because their fathers went, their neighbours go, and they do not love to be singular. They are regular in the outward forms of religion, from a principle of complaisance; which would make them good Catholics at Rome, and good Mussulmen at Constantinople.—Many go, not to hear, but to see, or to be seen.—There are, who hear sermons, from malice, not from devotion, that they may indulge a censorious criticising humour, by spying faults in the method, sentiments, style, or delivery. They come to judge and pass sentence on their teachers, not to receive instruction: but, in judging, they forget mercy and justice, and sport themselves with dressing the most serious and solemn truths in a fool's coat.—Others, with more good nature, though not a grain more of piety, come to church to admire, to applaud, and, almost, to idolize the preacher. A minister is, to them, as one who hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument; and they hear his words, but they will not do them. The judgment and accuracy of one preacher; the curious, uncommon observations of another; the fervent devotion of a third, the eloquence of a fourth, the graceful delivery of a fifth, are the most noticeable things they meet with in the house of God.—Some hear sermons, to furnish their heads with knowledge, not to enrich their hearts with grace; as if it would suffice, to know the strait and narrow way that leadeth to life, though they continue to walk in the broad way that leadeth to destruction.—Others go to church, to calm and appease their consciences. They are punctual in the externals of religion, and hope that exactness will compensate for now and then indulging some favourite

ite

ite lust, or neglecting some unpleasant expensive duty. They sit before God as his people do, not to learn the ordinances of judgment, but to make themselves easy in the habitual breach of them. Attendance on sermons, which is chiefly valuable as a mean of promoting faith and holiness, they fondly dream, will supply the place of both.—If hearers, of these different classes, receive no spiritual benefit, we need not wonder, for they do not so much as aim at it. The truth is, many hearers have no aim at all; and Luke's description of the mob at Ephesus perfectly suits them: "The assembly was confused, and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together^a." Such hearing, is so far from an act of religion, that it is unworthy the reason of a man. The most precious means of grace, if attended in this trifling manner, have no efficacy, to make us wiser or better. God, I acknowledge, may be found of them that seek him not, and may bless his ordinances, even to their conversion, who come to them from the worst of motives. But, if triflers with ordinances flatter themselves with such a display of sovereign grace, probably, their presumption may issue in galling disappointment.

Come, therefore, my brethren, to hear the gospel, with upright and pious intentions, from a sincere regard to God's authority, and with a single eye to his honour. Come, with fervent desires of spiritual good; and humble hopes that God will accompany, with his presence and blessing, an institution, which bears such evident stamps of his sacred authority. When your life is in danger, you regard not so much the polite address, or agreeable conversation of a physician, as his sagacity in finding out a disease, and in prescribing
the

^a Acts xix. 32.

the proper remedy. When your title to an estate is questioned, you prefer, to the flimsy declaimer, another, who, though little of the orator, can sift a cause to the bottom, establish a claim on solid foundations, and detect the subtle evasions of an antagonist. Preaching, my brethren, is instituted, to point out a remedy for our spiritual diseases, and a method for securing the heavenly inheritance: and yet, many hear sermons from the same motive as others read romances, or frequent the playhouse, that for an hour or two they may be amused or entertained; while not a few refuse to hear, or hear with listlessness and contempt, because their ears are not soothed with eloquent composition and harmonious periods. When the spiritual Physician points out the only method of escaping a speedy or a painful death, can you find leisure and inclination to count words and syllables, to examine if his discourse is agreeably delivered, his imagery striking, and the cadence of his periods proper? And is damnation your choice, if the Christian teacher doth not tell you, in a polite and handsome manner, how you may prevent it? What sovereign, when his laws were enacted and proclaimed with the usual forms, would bear it of his subjects, if they should plead, as an excuse for disregarding them, that they were composed in a flat, unpolished style, without the beauties of language, and charms of eloquence? Would he not reply, "The language in which my laws were published, was plain. You might have found in them your duty; and, since you did not attend to it, for your breach of them, you must find my displeasure." And will not the Sovereign of the universe resent such unworthy treatment of his ambassadors? Consider then, seriously, what was God's gracious

cious design, in commissioning ministers to preach unto you the everlasting gospel. It was to open the eyes of thoughtless sinners, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the living God. It was also for the perfecting of the saints, and edifying the body of Christ. Let these be your ends in hearing; and it may then be hoped our preaching shall not be vain, and your hearing shall not be vain. With humble confidence, O Christian, thou mayest look up to thy heavenly Father for the light of his countenance, and the influences of his grace: when thou canst say, with truth, "Lord, thou who knowest all things, knowest, that the light of thy countenance, and the influences of thy grace, are what I am come to seek. In the way which thou hast appointed, I now wait upon thee. The desire of my soul is towards thee, and towards the remembrance of thy name. I would listen to the instructions of thy servants, that I may be more thoroughly convinced of the evil of sin; more deeply affected with the wonders of redeeming love; more clearly enlightened in the knowledge of my duty; and more powerfully animated to the practice of it. I desire the sincere milk of the word, that I may grow thereby. I am here present before the Lord, to hear all things that are commanded me of the Lord. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth. Teach me the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it to the end: I will run in the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

II. Our hearing should be preceded, accompanied, and followed, by earnest prayers for the divine blessing. Why is preaching and hearing the word appointed?

It

It is not, that sinners, persuaded by the enticing words of man's wisdom, by strength of argument, or by force of eloquence, should be excited to try their skill in converting themselves : It is, because, by these, as means, the Spirit savingly works ; and therefore, we ought to place ourselves under them, waiting for his influence to make them effectual : praying that he would bear testimony to the word of his grace, and that it may prove the word by which we shall be saved, while our understanding is divinely enlightened to discern its truth and excellency. A weaker ministry is often remarkably successful, when attended from a serious sense of duty, and with a humble dependance on God's gracious promises : whereas raised expectations, from the gifts and abilities of a preacher, often provoke the Lord to blast his labours. A Paul may plant, and an Apollos water : but, even these must plant in vain, and water in vain, if God himself give not the increase. Though we could speak with the tongues of men and angels ; all would not avail to speak spiritual life into one dead soul. The word indeed is in its own nature quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword ; but it is only in the hands of the Spirit that it does effectual execution, and pierces through the inmost recesses of the heart. Outward means of instruction derive all their majesty, and beauty, and sweetness, and light, and life, and energy, from God's gracious presence. When this is withheld, we may call them Ichabod, for their glory is departed. The embassadors of God may preach to the ear : it is their Master's prerogative to preach to the heart. " Thus
" faith the Lord thy Redeemer, the holy One of Is-
" rael, I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee
" to

“to profit, which leadeth thee by the way which
“thou shouldst go ^b.”

When, then, you are about to attend a gospel ministry, say with Moses, “Lord, if thy presence go
“not with us, carry us not up hence ^c.” Turn the promises of God into prayers, and earnestly plead their accomplishment. “Lord, thou hast said, Where
“two or three are gathered together in my name,
“there am I in the midst of them ^d.” “Thou hast
“promised to thy church, I will abundantly bless her
“provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread; I
“will also clothe her priests with salvation; and her
“saints shall shout aloud for joy ^e.” “Good is thy
“word, O Lord: Be it unto thy servants, even as
“thou hast said. God be merciful unto us, and bless
“us, and cause his face to shine upon us ^f.” “Let
“thy word have a free course, and be glorified ^g.”
“Direct the thoughts of those who are to preach it,
“in their preparations for sanctuary service. Lead
“them to such subjects, and to such a method of
“handling them, as may best suit our spiritual ex-
“igencies. Let the gospel preached unto us, be
“preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from hea-
“ven, and prove the ministration of the Spirit, and
“of life. Put us, and keep us in a becoming frame
“for attending upon thee without distraction; and
“for hearing, and suitably improving, the great
“things of thy law, and the yet greater things of thy
“gospel. Grant unto us the understanding, the be-
“lieving, the obedient heart. For thy servant Jesus

N

“fate,

^b Is. xlviii. 17. ^c Ex. xxxiii. 15. ^d Math. xviii. 20.

^e Pl. cxxxii. 15, 16, ^f Pl. lxvii. 1, ^g 2 Thess. iii. 1.

“fake, deny us not this grace: turn not away the
“face of thine anointed h.”

Such as these should be our petitions in our secret retirements, ere we go to the house of God: and doubtless, were we fervent and constant in such petitions, our happy experience would attest, that God never said to the house of Jacob, Seek my face in vain.—But, even in the time of hearing, it will be profitable to put up short ejaculatory prayers, suited to the truths delivered. When any duty is recommended, “Lord, incline and enable me to practise it.” When any privilege is explained, “Lord, interest me in it.” When truth falls with peculiar weight upon the conscience, “Lord, keep this for ever on the imagination of my heart.” Such breathings of pious desire, will help, rather than hinder, our attending to, our being affected with, and our remembering what we hear.—To conclude this direction; let me recommend it to you, to water the seed sown with your prayers. Pray to God to forgive all your deadness, dullness, and wanderings of heart, in attending his ordinances: and that his word may not be as water spilt upon the ground, but may dwell in you richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and have a powerful and abiding influence on your temper and conduct. If you speak not thus to God in prayer, it is to be feared, when God speaks to you by his word, you will reap from it little benefit. We complain we are not edified by sermons. May not the little increase of the seed of the word flow, from the little care we take thus to implore that the dew of divine influence may water it?

III. Hear the word of God with pleasure and gratitude. Compare your circumstances with those of your forefathers,

forefathers, who had no other instructor than nature's light : and with those of the many dark places of the earth, full of the habitations of cruelty ⁱ. Think on later times, when a religion prevailed in these lands, retaining the name of Christian, but at enmity with the most important doctrines and laws of Christ, and breathing a spirit the reverse of his. Turn your eye to other countries, where ignorance is deemed the mother of devotion, and where spiritual guides take away the key of knowledge, not entering into the kingdom of heaven themselves, and, those who would enter in, hindering ^j. To you, God hath given his precepts, and his testimonies, when he hath not dealt so with every nation. Through the tender mercies of God, the day-spring from on high hath visited you, to give unto you the knowledge of salvation, by the remission of sins, and to guide your feet into the way of peace ^k. Pastors and teachers are commissioned to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the secure, to warn the unruly, to comfort the afflicted. " The Lord hath made known his salvation : his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heaven. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all the earth : make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise ^l." " God is the Lord, which hath showed us light : bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar ^m." " I will be glad, when they say unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem ⁿ!" " How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts ! A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. Blessed are they that dwell in thy

N 2

ⁱ Ps. lxxiv. 20.^j Luke xi. 52.^k Luke i. 77—79.^l Ps. xcvi. 2—4.^m Ps. cxviii. 27.ⁿ Ps. cxviii. 1, 2.

“thy house: they will be still praising thee. Se.
“lah c.”

IV. If you would profit by hearing the word, cultivate an honest impartial love to truth, and a meek, humble, candid, and teachable spirit.

We claim no dominion over your faith, no blind implicit belief of what we teach. We speak as to wise men. It is your part to judge what we say. We appeal to scripture, and to your own consciences, for the truth of our doctrine. We require you to bring it to the touchstone of the law, and of the testimony: and, if we speak not according to this word; if we deviate from our commission, and teach you things which Christ hath nowhere revealed or commanded; we permit you to pronounce, that, in so far, there is no light in us ^p. The Bible, my brethren, is the only complete and infallible directory of your faith and practice. Nothing ought to be admitted as an article of faith, or a rule of life, which is not either expressly contained in, or, by just consequence, inferred from the sacred oracles. The best and wisest of uninspired teachers have erred, and may err; and hearing would be dangerous indeed, if ye were not allowed to prove all things, in order to hold fast that, and only that, which is good ^q. Our assertions should have no authority with you, if we are unable to support them by scripture, or sound reason. Even, when truth is on our side, yet if you are not convinced of it by proper evidence, you would sin in embracing our sentiments. “I know,” says Paul ^r, “and am persuaded by the
“Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself:
“nevertheless,

^o Pl. lxxxiv. 1. 10. 4.

^q 1 Thess. v. 21.

^p Il. viii. 20.

^r Rom. xiv. 14.

“ nevertheless, to him that esteemeth any thing to be
“ unclean, to him it is unclean.” The apostles them-
selves thought it no disparagement to have their ser-
mons tried by the Old Testament; and the Bereans
are commended * as more noble than those of Thessa-
lonica, in that they received the word with all readi-
ness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whe-
ther these things were so. Certainly, if you may de-
termine whether an angel preaches another gospel, and
pronounce him accursed if he does †; you are much
more entitled to use such freedom with the most pious
and able of human teachers.

But, if our message should not be implicitly receiv-
ed: remember, it ought not to be implicitly rejected.
When ministers have not forfeited their reputation for
wisdom and integrity, you owe a becoming regard to
their judgment. Ministers have peculiar advantages
for knowing the will of God, and are under the most
solemn obligations to declare it, and in no instance
wilfully to impose upon you. What they say, if it is
not palpably absurd, if it bears no obvious mark of er-
ror, ought therefore to have great weight. That rea-
diness of mind, of which the Bereans were so noble a
pattern, must import freedom from prejudice against
the persons or doctrines of our teachers, willingness to
know the truth, faithfulness to present light, and a
mind open to further evidence. The apostle James
directs us ‡, “ with meekness to receive the ingrafted
“ word;” *i. e.* to receive it with a humble, teachable
disposition: cheerfully entertaining and submitting to
every thing which bears the impression of God’s au-
thority; not shutting our eyes against the light, or
wrangling and disputing against our duty, because

N 3

it

* Acts xvii, 11.

† Gal. i. 8.

‡ Ja. i. 21.

it thwarts our corrupt inclination, or worldly interest. Our Lord himself hath taught us the same thing. "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in nowise enter therein." Children are not conceited of their own knowledge; readily quit their opinions when good evidence is produced against them; are open to conviction; and pay a due deference to the sentiments of their instructors. In all this, it is necessary to resemble them, in order rightly to receive and improve the blessed gospel.

If, in the church of Rome, respect to the clergy arose much too high: doubtless, it hath fallen too low, in our church. Satan hath found means to betray many into an opposite, but equally dangerous extreme, and to fill them with groundless prejudice and disaffection against their faithful pastors. Indeed, nothing can more effectually advance the pernicious designs of the prince of darkness. When we disregard the speaker, we too readily disregard whatever he says. Even the wisest counsels, and most friendly and serious reproofs, have little effect, when they come from men whom we neither esteem nor love. Such would do well to remember this, who delight to tear in pieces the characters of ministers. There may be blemishes in the pulpit performances, or in the private behaviour of the best of them; but such blemishes, though they cannot be justified, should be forgiven. God does not teach you by angels, but by men, of like passions with yourselves, and exposed, by their station and office, to many peculiar temptations. You ought not, therefore, to expect from your teachers perfection in knowledge, or perfection in piety. The indulgence due to the common frailty of human nature,

ture, ought in all reason to be allowed them. If you expose their infirmities; if you aggravate into heresy their mistakes in matters of doubtful disputation; or, if you catch at inaccuracies of expression, to make them offenders for an ill chosen, or an ill placed word: you hereby do Satan an acceptable service, and your own souls an unspeakable injury. Though men may applaud your zeal, God will one day demand, "Who hath required this at your hands?" Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies; and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby ^w. Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God ^x. I know what strangers men naturally are to this meekness and humility; but the preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord ^y. Meekness is the fruit of the Spirit ^z. Apply, therefore, to him; to form in you, by his grace, that humble, teachable disposition, which is so necessary to render outward instruction truly profitable.

V. Hear the word with understanding and judgment: He only receiveth the seed into good ground, who heareth the word, and understandeth it ^a: We are reasonable creatures, and all our worship should be a reasonable service. We cannot assent to, be affected with, or reduce to practice, what we do not understand. The most heavenly instructions can have no influence on heart or life, if the sense of them is not perceived. When we contemplate truth in a pro-

N 4

per

^w 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.^x Ja. i. 19, 20.^y Prov. xvi. 1.^z Gal. v. 23.^a Math. xiii. 23.

per light, and discern her in her native beauty and lustre: then, and not till then, she strikes with force on the conscience, gains fast hold of the affections, and powerfully influences the behaviour. The faithful saying is approved, as worthy of all acceptance; and we become able to give to others a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear.

Yet, alas! though ministers preach the pure gospel in a distinct and methodical manner, and endeavour to accommodate themselves to the very lowest capacities: multitudes hear sermons, without entering into the meaning and spirit of them; and hence return from them as ignorant of the things of God, and as unimpressed with them, as they were before. Through their unskilfulness in the word of righteousness, even ministers, who use the greatest plainness of speech, are to them as if they preached in an unknown tongue. They are ever learning. They regularly attend the preaching of the word; but they are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth^b. For they understand not those first principles of the doctrine of Christ, by which they must be guided to understand and judge of all the rest. The most familiar and pathetic addresses are lost upon them. The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not^c. Doubtless, the neglect of family catechizing, contributes not a little to this evil. Were children early instructed in the great articles of Christian faith and practice, the labours of ministers would be more pleasant, and more successful.

Nevertheless, whatever the neglects of your parents have been, they are no apology for your remaining in gross ignorance. The light shines around you. You need

^b 2 Tim. iii. 7.

^c Jo. i. 5.

need only open your eyes to admit it. If you admit it not, it is a sure indication, that you love darkness rather than light, because your hearts and deeds are evil ^d. You have Bibles, and liberty to use them. You have catechisms and other books of instruction, in which, the necessary and fundamental truths of religion are brought level to the lowest capacities. If, after all, you remain ignorant of them, you must needs be wilfully ignorant. Notwithstanding your alleged slowness of apprehension, you would make a shift to understand our meaning, if we could instruct you in the mysteries of some profitable trade, or teach you a sure and speedy method of getting wealth. Whence then is it, that when we speak to you of heavenly things, you understand us not? Let conscience point out the fatal cause, and sound in your ears these awful threatenings; “It is a people of no understanding: therefore, he that made them, will not have mercy on them; and he that formed them, will shew them no favour ^e.” “Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ^f.”

Would you then hear the word with profit? Study to be well acquainted with the sacred oracles. From these, form to yourselves a regular scheme of Christianity. And, above all, ask spiritual wisdom of that God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ^g. Then shall you feel, in your happy experience, the accomplishment of the promise, *Is. xxix. 18, 24.*

“And

^d *Jo. iii. 19.* ^e *Is. xxvii. 11.* ^f *2 Thess. i. 7—9.* ^g *Ja. i. 5.*

“ And in that day, shall the deaf hear the words of
“ the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of
“ obscurity, and out of darkness. They, also, that
“ erred in spirit, shall come to understanding; and
“ they that murmured, shall learn doctrine.”

But there are many who have competent measures of knowlege, and yet seldom hear with understanding and judgment. If you reason with them on matters of politics or of trade, they exercise the understanding of men. Only when they enter the house of God, it would seem, they lose all use of this noble faculty. It cannot be said, that the reasonings in sermons, are presently forgotten, like a tale that is told: for, even in the time of hearing, they make not half the impression, which a trifling story would have made. The judgment is little, if at all exercised, upon them; and hence, demonstration itself operates no conviction.

Endeavour, therefore, to enter into the meaning of sermons: and, in order to this, observe, with the closest application of mind, the general scope and design of a discourse, the truth or duty proposed to be explained, the evidence offered in support of what is asserted, the various branches into which a subject is divided, and the practical lessons which result from it: and, after all, from a deep consciousness of remaining blindness and ignorance, earnestly implore the enlightening influences of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that he may open your eyes to behold the wonders of God's word. The most steady intenseness of thought, on the one hand, and the most entire dependence on divine teaching on the other, are both of absolute necessity. Paul was fully sensible of this, when, with one breath, he exhorts Timothy, “ Consider what I
“ say,”

"say," and puts up a prayer for him, "The Lord
"give thee understanding in all things ^h."

PART II.

VI. Hear with attention, seriousness, and solemnity of spirit. No benefit can be reaped from sermons, if there is not an outward listening of the ear, and an inward application of the mind, to what is spoken. Men are renewed and sanctified by the truth. But truth, not heard with serious attention, has no such salutary energy. The terrors of the law cannot alarm the sinner; the kind and gracious calls of the gospel cannot allure him; the most affecting objects cannot excite his desires, or determine his choice, if he gives no earnest heed to the things which he hears.

A drowsy slumbering frame must therefore be struggled against. Men who indulge it, cannot properly be called hearers; for, in sleep, the ear is shut, the senses locked up; the gospel can have no entrance; the clearest representations of truth cannot instruct; the most lively expostulations cannot move; so that the sleeper might be as well at home, as at church. Nay, better were it that he never entered a worshiping assembly, than that, by a behaviour so unsuitable to the venerable presence of God, he should lead others to account sermons dull and stupifying entertainment, fit only to lull men asleep. I mean not this censure for such, who can plead with truth, that the spirit indeed is willing, though the flesh is weak ⁱ. A heaviness painfully felt, and difficultly resisted, especially, if felt in our own houses, as well as in the house
of

^h 2 Tim. ii. 7.

ⁱ Math. xxvi. 41.

of God, may justly be ascribed to a feeble constitution, to contracted indisposition, to spirits exhausted by the necessary cares and labours of life, or, to the infirmities of age. Though, even in that case, there is room for blame, as well as pity, if men use not their utmost efforts, to prevent, or to overcome this heaviness in religious exercises. Such, who feel themselves subject to it, should avoid excessive fatigue, or too full a meal, before they go to church; because a wearied body, or an overcharged stomach, are almost invincible enemies to watchfulness. But, how monstrous the guilt of young and healthy people, who, when the Sovereign of the universe is setting before them, life and death, the blessing and the curse ^j, can lean, and loll, and compose themselves for rest, as if churches were intended, not to edify the soul, but to refresh the body! What! secure wretches, have ye not houses of your own to sleep in, that ye thus despise the church of God? Can you not watch with Christ one hour? An earthly prince, should you fall asleep whilst he was addressing you, would resent it as a vile indignity. And have you forgot, that the Lord of Hosts is a great King, and his name dreadful among the Heathen? Cursed is the deceiver, who hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing ^k! who, when an insignificant worldly interest is at stake, is all watchfulness and attention: and then only sluggish and unaffected, when he hears of God, and Christ, and eternity. Death may come at any time, and in any place. To some it hath come in the house of God. But, how stunning a surprise must it prove to the sleepy hearer, if first awakened by that dreadful and irreversible sentence;

“ Take

^j Deut. xxx. 19.

^k Mal. i. 14.

“ Take him, bind him hand and foot, and cast him
“ into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and
“ gnashing of teeth ^l.”

What I have said of drowsy hearers, holds more strongly of those who proclaim their profanity by deliberate appearances of neglect or scorn, by impudently staring others in the face, curiously marking their dress and behaviour, and endeavouring to interrupt their attention, and, if possible, to provoke their laughter, by impertinent whispers, or indecent smiles. I will not waste words, in painting the profligacy of their character, who take such pains to disclose to all men, the naughtiness of their hearts. This conduct must needs be construed, an open insult on God's honour, and a risking the most direful effects of his jealousy and indignation.

But, alas ! the eye may be fixed, the ear apparently attentive, and the countenance grave and composed, when the mind is roving with the fool's eye to the ends of the earth. Many appear in God's courts with all the visible marks of reverence, to whom, inward seriousness is altogether a stranger. They sit before their teachers, as God's people do, and they hear their words, but they will not do them ; for, with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness ^m. Their bodies bow before God, and seem to worship him. The devotion of their hearts is paid to Mammon. The good seed of the word, choked by the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, becometh unfruitful ⁿ. Imaginary scenes of pleasure, artful contrivances to raise a fortune, or perplexing thoughts, how to guard against, or to repair outward calamities, engross their minds,

^l Math. xxv. 30. ^m Ezek. xxxiii. 31. ⁿ Math. xiii. 22.

minds, and unfit them for attending upon God without distraction. The world is glued to their hearts, and they will not attempt to shake it off. The idea of it haunts them wherever they go; and their imagination and affections, unrestrained by the solemnities of worship, run into that channel, which long use hath worn out for them. One, anticipates the transports of gratifying an impetuous appetite, or recollects how happy he was yesterday in such a place, and with such a company. Another, is fretted with thinking, what tricks have been put upon him, what opportunities of gain he hath unfortunately let slip, and, what debts are due him, which probably he may never recover. A third, is restless how to procure a post, to wreak his vengeance on one who hath affronted him, or to undermine those who thwart his ambitious prospects. The accidental sight of a stranger, and some slight resemblance he bears to a person well known, recalls to the imagination past scenes, and blows up into a flame the latent sparks of inordinate affection, envy, or revenge. A piece of news told in the way to church, a word in the sermon itself, or an observation whispered in our ear by a fellow worshipper, gradually leads off our thoughts from the glad tidings of salvation, to something unprofitable or pernicious.

When, therefore, you are about to ascend the hill of the Lord, let the world stand off, and keep its distance. Suspend all thoughts of the pleasures, riches, and honours of this life. Divest yourselves of every worldly care. Say to your lawful outward concerns, as Abraham to his young men, "Abide you here, and I will go yonder and worship o." And,

23

as a sudden change of frame is seldom attainable, if you can lawfully avoid it, do not run to the house of God, from a hurry of pleasure or of business. Ere you come to receive the seed of the word, break up your fallow ground, and root out your thorns. You would pronounce him mad, who sowed his fields, while covered with stones, overgrown with weeds, and unprepared by the plough for receiving and nourishing the seed committed to them. Beware of acting such madness, in a case infinitely more important, where, not provision for a year is at stake, but provision for eternity. Take pains with your hearts in private, by lively actings of faith, by fervent prayer, and by devout meditation, to empty them of vanity, to excite in them becoming seriousness, to inclose and fence them from the inroads of a roving imagination, and so to melt and soften them, that they may receive, without resistance, the proper and full impression from every truth. If Christians would thus endeavour to prepare their hearts for approaching to God, they would find it easier, in the time of hearing, to exclude unseasonable thoughts, to check the wanderings of fancy, and to fix their attention on the great and interesting realities of an unseen world.

After all, the utmost solemnity of spirit, attained by the most watchful Christian, is much too little, when we consider the transcendent majesty of the God who speaks, the excellence and importance of what is spoken, and the near concern that every one of us hath in it. We preach not in our own name, but in His name, and by His authority, who is the equal and fellow of the Almighty. God doth beseech you by us. "We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God P." "He that heareth us, heareth
" him ;

“ him ; and he that despiseth us, despiseth him ^a.” As we speak by God’s authority, so God is present with us, and observes, with a jealous eye, what entertainment you give to our message. If you come to church with a vain mind, as others go to places of amusement, or with a common frame of spirit, as when you pay a visit, or transact business ; shall not God search this out ? for he trieth the secrets of the heart ^r. With awful concern, you would stand before the tribunal of an earthly judge, if life or death was to be determined by his sentence : With reverence you would approach an earthly potentate, to receive his commands, or to solicit his favour : And is less concern sufficient, when the question is, how you shall escape the damnation of hell ? Or less reverence suitable, when a message is brought you from the King of heaven ; nay, when you are present before God, to hear the things that are commanded you of God ? The certainty, excellence, and importance of divine things, should rouse your most wakeful attention, summon every faculty of the soul into vigorous exercise, and engage your very warmest affections. It is observed of our Lord, Luke, xix. 48. “ That all the “ people were attentive to hear him.” They hung upon his lips, and watched every word that dropped from his mouth. Should not our eagerness equal theirs, when a now exalted Redeemer speaks to us, from the right hand of the Majesty on high ? Should we not set our hearts to what is testified in the gospel, seeing it is not a vain thing, but our life ? It is but a little while, and we must preach no more, and ye must hear no more. To some of you, even this present opportunity may be the last, and, ere the return

of

^a Luke xi. 16.^r Ps. xliv. 21.

of another Sabbath, an account may be required of you, how you have improved this. Hear, then, as for eternity; and boast not yourselves of to-morrow, for you know not what a day may bring forth ^f.

VII. Let such a lively faith mix itself with your hearing, as will produce affections suited to the truths you hear. A report, however interesting in its own nature, if not credited, can neither engage our affections, nor influence our practice. The gospel worketh effectually in them that receive it, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of the living God ^t. It is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth ^u. With them that believe not, it signifies nothing. Over them it hath no power. They regard it no more than the word of a child, or of one whose veracity is suspected. The word preached doth not profit, not being mixed with faith in them that hear it ^v. Faith must impregnate this good seed, ere it become a living operative principle of holy obedience. Faith must convert this heavenly manna into proper nourishment for the soul. This faith is due, not barely to the precise language of Scripture, but to the divine truths conveyed in that language; and therefore, sermons which contain the sense of scripture, though not altogether composed of scripture expressions, ought to be regarded as declaring truths, and truths of incomparable excellence and importance—I say, as declaring truths of incomparable excellence and importance; for faith contemplates not only the truth, but the excellence and importance of divine things. The first gains our assent, the second our love. God demands, that the heart, as well as the intellectual powers, should be consecrated to his service. If we

O

feel

^f Prov. xxvii. i. ^t 1 Thess. ii. 13. ^u Rom. i. 16. ^v Heb. iv. 2.

feel no warmth of heart, when the most awful or amiable truths are set before us, our conviction of them must needs be slight and superficial. Here, it is necessary to observe, that affections, raised by sermons, will not avail us, if the weight and importance of the matter is not their source. Impressions from soft and elegant language, or an engaging voice and delivery, are easily effaced. Where the eyes of the understanding are enlightened, truth, even in her most homely dress, by her own native beauty and lustre, irresistibly attracts. Whatever, therefore, is the subject of a sermon, whether scripture history, or doctrine, or precept, or promise, or threatening, let us realize what we hear. When the examples of saints in former ages are described, let these convince us, that holiness is attainable as well as lovely; and animate us to be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, do now inherit the promises. When we hear the precepts of the law, let our hearts subscribe to them, as holy, and just, and good. When threatenings are denounced, let faith excite in us, as it did in Noah^w and Habakkuk^x, a pious fear and trembling, and an earnest desire to escape the evils threatened. When sermons bring to our remembrance, the corruptions of our hearts, or the sins of our lives, let a sense of them produce the deepest shame, sorrow, and contrition. When Christ is preached, as sent to save even the chief of sinners, and as inviting all to come to him, that they may have life; let us receive this as a faithful saying, and worthy of our warmest and most joyful acceptation. When the wonders of redeeming love are displayed, let views of them inflame our gratitude to our heavenly friend; and, when the ineffi-

mable

^w Heb. xi. 7.^x Habak. iii. 16.

mable blessings of Christ's purchase are represented, let these darken, in our eyes, all the honours and pleasures of this lower world; and persuade us, that such only are happy, whose God is the Lord.—But I must not detain you, by enumerating particulars. Every truth, without exception, ought to be received, in the love of it. So far from bearing it impatiently, when we are roundly told our duty or our danger: we should rejoice, when sins are testified against, that do more easily beset us, and duties inculcated, to which our corrupt inclinations are most averse. If the hidden deceits of the heart are unveiled, instead of hating the light, and fortifying ourselves against it, we should bless God, that we are not left to feed upon ashes, and to go to the grave with a lie in our right hands. But, alas! so vitiated is our natural taste, that the most wholesome spiritual food, often appears to us unpleasant and nauseous. Discourses on the nature and necessity of sincerity, of heavenly-mindedness, of mortification, of a meek, humble, and forgiving spirit, will never be relished by the hypocrite, the covetous, the sensualist, the proud, the revengeful: and, unless the Spirit show unto men their iniquities, and transgressions wherein they have exceeded, the doctrine of Christ's atonement and righteousness, will be to them a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. And this leads me to an eighth direction.

VIII. Wisely apply what you hear, to your own case; and, for that end, endeavour to be well acquainted with the true state of your souls. It is their work, who are stewards of God's household, to give to every one his portion of food in due season. It is your work to take, and feed upon that portion; other-

wife; in the midst of plenty, your souls must starve. Meat, not eaten, nourisheth not : and the most sovereign balsam cannot heal your wounds, if you refuse to apply it, and scornfully say, another needs it more. Many are mighty expert, at transferring to their neighbours, counsels and instructions, warnings and reproofs, in which they themselves are equally concerned ; and, when hearing sermons, indulge the fond and spiteful thought, that the picture of such another was well drawn, and his vices handsomely exposed. How preposterous and unreasonable is this ! The gospel contains discoveries of infinite importance to every one of us. Every one of us, therefore, is bound, in interest, as well as duty, to improve these discoveries for his own benefit. To such a particular application of religious instruction, Eliphaz exhorted Job :
“ Lo, this we have searched it, so it is : Hear it, and
“ know thou it for thy good.” Ministers are bound to declare the whole counsel of God ; hearers to apply every part of that counsel. “ All scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for
“ instruction in righteousness ².” It is useful for the sanctified in Jesus, to hear truths, which more immediately relate to the unconverted, that they may be excited to joy and thankfulness for their own deliverance, and to tender emotions of Christian compassion, for souls yet ready to perish : and it is useful for the unconverted, to hear of the dignity and happiness of saints, that this may raise in them ardent desires to become partakers of the same grace of life. Besides, Christians may experience the sweetness of a promise, or the usefulness of a direction, scores of years after they first heard it. An hour may come, when truths shall
deeply

¹ Job v. 27.² 2 Tim. iii. 16.

deeply concern them, which have little immediate suitableness to their present frame and circumstances. They should therefore give ear, and hearken, and hear for the time to come ^a.

Whatever, therefore, is the subject of a sermon, regard it, my brethren, as what you either need now, or may need hereafter. Believe, that God speaks to you in particular, and, for your benefit, put such or such a word into the mouth of the preacher. Say, of every doctrine, This is my lesson, I must learn it: of every command, This is my duty, I must practise it: of every admonition, This is a warning for me, I must give heed to it: of every promise, This is my encouragement, I must live upon it. Such close personal application of what you hear, will greatly promote the influence of it on your hearts and lives.

Yet, doubtless, it concerns you, in a more especial manner, to apply the truths which are peculiarly adapted to your outward or inward condition. Now, what is thus adapted, you cannot know, unless you know whether you are spiritually alive, or dead in trespasses and sins; growing in grace, or languishing and going backward. The most wholesome spiritual food is often perverted into poison, through men's ignorance of their real character. Believers lose their comfort: unbelievers lose their souls. Sincere Christians, suspecting themselves hypocrites, through fear of wrath, are, all their lifetime, subject to bondage. The promises, which should be their song in the house of their pilgrimage, they put far from them: and the threatenings, which God hath denounced against the impenitent, they apprehend levelled against them. But, the opposite error is more common, and more

O 3

fatal,

^a If. xlii. 23.

fatal. Even good men are too little sensible of the defects of their goodness, and of the strength of their corruptions. Carnal, secure sinners, feel, in no degree, the woful plague of their own hearts; and hence, rashly snatch at comfort, to which they have no title. Though a sovereign remedy is in their offer, they, being ignorant of their disease, see no occasion for such a remedy, and disregard the offer; and thus, the disease gains strength, and preys upon their very vitals. How needful then is it, if we would rightly apply the word, to examine and prove ourselves, and earnestly to plead with God, that he would search and try our ways, and discover what evil way may be in us!

Be exhorted, therefore, to get well acquainted with your own special circumstances, and then wisely accommodate to them the general instructions of God's word. When any thing more directly reaches your case, submit to conviction, however painful it prove. Say to thyself, as Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man ^b. The minister, possibly, had no particular aim, or aimed at another. But, certainly the Spirit of God aimed at me, and, in compassion to me, sent him with that message. My conscience is sensibly touched. I feel, I acknowledge, that I am guilty. To man, I never imparted my thoughts. None but God was witness to them. Yet, lo! they have been pointed out, and reproved with the utmost exactness. Often have I committed the sins cautioned against: often have I neglected the duties recommended. Now, at length, I see the evil of my ways, and my doings, which have not been good. Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Art

^b 2 Sam. xii. 7.

Art thou an unbeliever? Apply to thyself all the threatenings of the law. Let thy heart meditate terror. The voice of God assureth thee, that thou, in particular, art condemned already, and that the wrath of God abideth on thee ^c.

Dost thou hear the calls and invitations of the gospel? Realize it, that to thee, in particular, the word of salvation is sent ^d; that through Jesus is preached to thee the forgiveness of sins ^e; and that God, having raised up his Son, hath sent him to bless thee, in turning thee away from thine iniquities ^f. But realize it also, that thou canst not escape the most dreadful punishment, if thou neglect so great salvation: When Jesus says, "Come to me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" let thy heart reply, "Behold, I come to Thee. To whom can I go, but to Thee? Thou, only, hast the words of eternal life!"

Doth the spirit of God witness with thy spirit, that thou art one of God's children? When thou hearest explained the promises of that covenant, which is everlasting, well ordered in all things, and sure, look upon every one of them as thy portion. With joy draw water out of these wells of salvation. Solace thyself, that the lines are fallen to thee in pleasant places, and that thou hast a goodly heritage. Join in David's song, ^g "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from de-

O 4

struction;

^c Jo. iii. 18, 36.^d Acts xiii. 26.^e Acts xiii. 38.^f Acts iii. 26.^g Ps. ciii. 1—4.

“struction ; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness
“and tender mercies.”

PART III.

I have now finished the directions I proposed to give you, concerning the dispositions and exercises of mind with which sermons ought to be heard. But *we must take heed to our frame and conduct, after hearing*, as well as before, and in the time of it, if we would indeed reap saving benefit from the preached word. Medicines often produce their natural effect on the body, though by the patient they are not attended to and helpt forward in their operation ; but, to the diseases of the soul, the word of God, when thus neglected, is no cure. God, who allows us six days to labour and do all our work, hath wisely restrained us, on the seventh, from thinking our own thoughts, speaking our own words, or finding our own pleasure, that in the closet and family we may rivet impressions made in the church, and devote ourselves, with undisturbed attention, to his worship, and to the working out our own salvation. Yet, alas ! few thus remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Men return to the world, the moment they leave the house of God. The merchant hastens to his accompts, and the scholar to his books. By the gay and polite, the Sabbath is spent in visits, in walking in public places, or in giving and receiving entertainments. On these occasions, business or politics, dress and fashions, plays and assemblies, eating and drinking, are too often the favourite topics of conversation. A sermon is seldom mentioned, unless to criticise the preacher, or perhaps wantonly

wantonly and maliciously to apply some part of it for blackening and exposing a worthy character. When these interviews are over, little or no time remains for retirement; and the mind is so dissipated, that all power and inclination is lost for recollecting the divine message, and imploring the influences of grace to bless it. This neglect of prayer and meditation, may appear natural, accidental, and in some cases unavoidable; yet, in thus trifling away hours which ought to be sacred to God and eternity, we yield to the snares of Satan. That subtle and wicked spirit artfully endeavours, by engaging us in such avocations, to take the word out of our hearts, lest we should believe, and be saved. He lurks behind the curtain. Alarmed, lest the gospel deprive him of his usurped dominion, he directs and manages, though we perceive him not, the means, instruments and occasions of this our faulty conduct. Let us no longer consent and lend our aid to his destructive designs. Quench not the Spirit; stifle not the convictions of conscience; misimprove not the day of your merciful visitation. And, for this purpose, more particularly,

I. Endeavour to remember what you have heard. We cannot be saved by a forgotten word; and we know the truth in vain, and believe it in vain, if we do not remember it. This we are taught by these awful expressions, 1 Cor. xv. 2. "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached to you, unless ye have believed in vain." It is impossible that a sermon should rightly affect and influence us, which leaves on the mind an impression no more abiding, than that which the motion of a ship makes on the water, or a hollow sound on the air.

Hence

Hence the forgetful hearer, Ja. i. 25, is opposed to the doer of the word, and is represented, v. 23, by a man beholding his natural face in a glass, and going his way, and straightway forgetting what manner of man he was. A transient glance discovered some blemish on his face; but the faint impression it made on his imagination, quickly vanishes, and, not observing it distinctly, he is at no pains to wipe it off.—Perhaps you will plead, “It is my grief and burden, that I retain so little of sermons; but my memory is weak and treacherous, and I cannot help it.” If this is indeed the case, know, for your comfort, that where there is a willing mind, it is accepted, according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not^r. God is not a hard master, reaping where he hath not sown, and gathering where he hath not strewed^s. Our natural talents depend on his sovereign pleasure, not on our own choice. Still, however, the faculties of the soul, like those of the body, may be strengthened by constant and diligent use. Some of you have infants, who can neither walk, nor speak, nor read; but you feel no anxiety on that account. From what every day happens, you entertain no doubt, that, by slow and imperceptible steps, they will acquire an ability of doing all those things with ease and pleasure. Believe me, even in riper years, the memory, by proper exercise, is capable of amazing improvements. Make a trial. Every day commit to your memory some short passage of Scripture, and repeat what you have thus learned, at certain intervals, that you may not forget it again. Habituate yourselves, when you read sermons at home, carefully to observe, and firmly to retain, what is most essential

^r 2 Cor. viii. 12.^s Math. xxv. 24.

essential and important. This would much help your remembering what you hear.

Meantime, I wish that some, who plead the weakness of their memories as an excuse for their forgetting sermons, could satisfyingly account for it, why their memories serve them so well on other occasions, and fail them only on this. An idle tale, they can easily remember, and distinctly repeat. Though they transact a variety of wordly business, seldom is any important branch of it forgotten. But, scarcely is the sound of a sermon out of their ears, when the sense of it is out of their minds. Judge, then, whether such forgetfulness flows from weakness of memory, or from depravity of heart. Hear sermons, therefore, with suitable intenseness of thought, and give the more earnest heed to the things you hear, lest at any time you let them slip. Study to understand them thoroughly, and to be deeply affected with them. Carefully observe the method and order of a sermon, the general heads, and the several particulars under each of them. When a new particular is mentioned, repeat to yourselves former particulars, without, however, dwelling so long upon them as to lose sight of that new one. Endeavour to recollect as much as possible of a sermon, immediately on your return home, before other thoughts intervene to drive it out of your memories. Seek the help of some Christian friend, to put you in remembrance of what you have forgotten, and talk over together the most striking and useful sentiments. When you have leisure, and see occasion for it, commit to writing, on a Lord's day's evening, the heads of a discourse, the scripture proofs, and some short hints of the enlargement. If, in the conscientious use of these, and such like endeavours,

you

you humbly implore the aids of the Holy Ghost to teach you all things, and to bring all things to your remembrance; through the blessing of God, your memories will strengthen, and impressions made on them by sermons will not be so suddenly effaced. Many might remember the scope and substance of a discourse, and still more would carry home with them, at least some scattered instructions, exhortations or directions, the musing on which might excite emotions of divine love in their hearts. Even they who could remember least, would find their stock of knowledge imperceptibly increase, and their devout affections and resolutions become more lively and vigorous. Were men thus active, the evil one would not find it so easy to catch away that which was sown in their hearts.

II. Meditate, and expostulate with your hearts, upon what you have heard. When you have recollected as much as possible of a sermon, preach it over to yourselves, and dwell upon it, till your souls are stirred up to suitable affections, and you can say with the prophet ^t, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them;” and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of “my heart.” Think not, when the minister has done preaching, that your work is over. The knowledge and sound understanding with which he has fed you, will not nourish, unless digested. That must be your work; for no other can do it for you. What you have heard, will be worse than lost, if conscience is not employed to set all home, and to urge you to speedy and stedfast resolutions of a corresponding practice. Retire, therefore, from church into your closets, or,

at

^t Jer. xv. 16.

at least, retire into your hearts. Ponder the truths which you have heard. Consider their undoubted certainty, and infinite importance. Compare with them, your temper and conduct. Your spiritual welfare is of greater consequence to you, than it is to your teachers. Study, therefore, to outdo their fervour, by the earnestness of your own private expostulations. Cease not from them, till your understandings are convinced, and your wills consent. Though, in the time of hearing, you felt little warmth; perhaps, in this way, a heavenly flame may be kindled in your breasts. While thus you meditate on God's word, you shall be as trees planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth fruit in season: your leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever you do shall prosper^u.—But, can it be expected, that serious impressions should prove deep and lasting, when men get into a habit of hurrying from church, into profane, or at least idle company, where much is said to smother, and scarce any thing to cherish, the good motions felt in time of hearing? Alas! convictions are stifled in the birth; and the spirit of grace having striven with sinners, but striven in vain, provoked at this unworthy usage, ceases to be a reprover. To-day, the sinner, by the noise of secular business, or of sensual pleasure, drowns the voice of God and conscience; and, when Christ knocks at the door of his heart, he is not at leisure to open it. To-morrow, God shuts the door of mercy; and the sinner cries, but cries in vain, Lord, Lord, open unto me. Dismal, but deserved catastrophe! Are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? saith the Lord of Hosts.

III. Converse with your fellow-Christians about what you have heard. When a scheme is proposed and enforced, by plausible arguments, for advancing the prosperity of our country, or securing it from some dreadful impending danger, it naturally attracts the public attention, and, for some time, engrosses the conversation in every company. Discoveries of the way of life, would produce a similar effect, were the concerns of another world regarded by us, in proportion to their merit. When Paul preached among the Jews at Rome, “ they departed, and had great reasoning among themselves v.” They thought it a question that well deserved the strictest scrutiny, whether the gospel was a cunningly devised fable, or a revelation from God. It was thus among Jews and Heathens. But, in our age, and in a country of professed Christians, to speak of Christianity with the least air of seriousness, is, by many, deemed a proof that too much piety hath made men mad. The name of Methodist, is the mildest reproach cast upon such, as if fervent devotion, and a conscientious regard to duty, were monopolized by those who adopt the peculiar opinions and practices of that sect. In the mean time, we know, that the highest authority hath enjoined w, “ Let no corrupt communication proceed “ out of your mouths, but that which is good for the “ use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the “ hearers.” And the supreme Lawgiver and Judge hath threatened x, “ Whosoever shall be ashamed of “ me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful “ generation ; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.” These statutes of heaven,

v Acts xxviii. 29.

w Eph. iv. 29.

x Mark viii. 38.

heaven, enforced by such awful sanctions, were never repealed by the authority that enacted them: and it will not be pretended that any lesser authority is sufficient to dissolve their obligation. I mean not, by this, that the young who are setting out in religion should assume airs of superiority, and set up for counsellors and instructors of those, whose age, rank, and character, claim their humble respect. What is obtruded as spiritual charity, often disgusts and provokes: when, what is hinted in a modest, delicate, and winning manner, is gratefully received, and diligently improved. I mean not, that men should cast pearls before swine, and introduce religious subjects, where, it is morally certain, they will be universally turned into ridicule. But, surely, that charity which thinketh no evil, will not, without full evidence, form so harsh a judgment. In more sober companies, the now and then dropping a word for God and religion, to illustrate or confirm what was delivered from the pulpit, could not offend. Was this done with discretion, especially by men of influence and character, desirable effects would often follow. If, however, in promiscuous companies, we judge it prudent to hold our peace even from good; let us, on the evening of the Sabbath, avoid such companies. It is not easy to keep our mouth as with a bridle, when the dissipated and thoughtless are before us. The natural levity of our hearts throws us off our guard, and betrays us into evil, ere we are aware of danger. Remember, therefore, that the Sabbath is holy to the Lord your God. If you go from home any part of it, let it be either to give, or to receive spiritual benefit; to learn from others, or to instruct them. Talk over what you have heard, with your children and families, and, if you
have

have opportunity, with some dear and intimate Christian friend. This will at once rivet it more firmly in your memories, and greatly tend to warm and quicken your hearts. Read, my brethren, the affecting history, Luke xxiv. of the respect put upon religious conversation by our Lord himself, the first Christian Sabbath, while the two disciples, in their way to Emmaus, are talking together of the doctrine, the miracles, the holy life, and the sufferings of Jesus. It is said, ver. 15. that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. Might it not be hoped, that, if the proportion of the Sabbath allotted to fellowship with Christian friends, was improved by us in like edifying discourse, Jesus would vouchsafe us his gracious presence, and so touch our hearts and lips with a live coal from his altar, that we might say, on a review, “ Did not our hearts burn within us, while, not only our friend, but our Saviour, talked with us, and opened to us the scriptures ? ” Thus, the voice of rejoicing, and of salvation, would be heard in the tabernacles of the righteous. Their hearts would be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches, to the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ ^v. By watering the souls of others, their own souls should also be watered : and, by doing good, they should receive good. Their stock of knowledge and grace, like the widow’s oil, whilst they poured it out to others, would multiply and increase. The remembrance of such interviews would be pleasant ; and Christian friends would say one to another, as Paul to the Romans ², “ I long to see you, that I may impart

“ to

¹ Col. ii. 2.² Rom. i. 11, 12,

“ to you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be
“ established ; that is, that I may be comforted toge-
“ ther with you, by the mutual faith both of you and
“ me.” Let, therefore, the word of God dwell rich-
ly in you in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one
another ; neither forsaking the assembling of yourselves
together, nor neglecting, when you come home, to
exhort one another daily, whilst it is called to-day,
lest any man be hardened through the deceitfulness of
sin.

IV. Reduce what you have heard to practice. Gos-
pel truths are revealed, not barely to be known and
contemplated, but to sanctify the heart, and to govern
the life. Nothing in scripture is purely speculative.
Even the most sublime mysteries furnish proper mo-
tives to the practice of duty, and the exercise of grace :
and hence, in scripture style, they only hear the word,
who regard and comply with God’s design in it, im-
proving it as a light to their feet, and a lamp to their
paths. If the preached word is false, to hear it is too
much. If it is true, to hear it, without regulating
our practice by it, is nothing. Almost every passage
of scripture, and almost every sermon, proclaims the
indispensable necessity of holy hearts, and of obedient
lives. Hear His solemn declaration, who one day
shall appear to judge the quick and the dead :—“ Not
“ every one that faith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall
“ enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that do-
“ eth the will of my Father, which is in heaven.
“ Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine,
“ and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man,
“ which built his house upon a rock. And the rain
“ descended, and the floods came, and the winds

P

“ blew,

“blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not,
 “for it was founded upon a rock. And every one
 “that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them
 “not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which
 “built his house upon the sand. And the rain de-
 “scended, and the floods came, and the winds blew;
 “and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.” Can
 you then expect to get to heaven, by hearing ser-
 mons, though persisting in the wilful neglect of duty,
 or in the commission of sin? Will hearing a lecture
 of medicine, cure a disease? Will attending a course
 of navigation, transport you to the Indies? Is every
 one a painter, a poet, an orator, or a hero, who hath
 heard ingenious discourses on painting, poetry, and
 rhetoric, or panegyrics on an Alexander or a Cæsar?
 And yet, multitudes flatter themselves, that hearing
 the prescriptions of a spiritual physician will avail,
 without following them; and that learning the way
 to life, without walking in that way, will land them
 in glory. A thief or murderer never pled, in arrest
 of justice, that he had heard the laws against theft
 or murder, and the sentences passed by judges, upon
 others convicted of these crimes. And can you dream,
 that your being often exhorted to love God with all
 the heart, and your neighbour as yourself, will be
 sustained as an apology for your neither loving God
 nor your neighbour? or that, because you have often
 heard the threatenings of God denounced against dis-
 honesty, impurity, intemperance, and other crimes,
 you are therefore safe, though, in contempt of God’s
 threatenings, you commit those crimes? The Lord
 of the universe takes no pleasure in presumptuous re-
 bels, for mingling themselves with his loyal subjects.

It

It is in vain you attempt to impose upon him, by substituting the knowledge of your duty, or the means of that knowledge, for inward godliness and a regular conversation. God is not mocked. To hear your duty, and then to transgress it, is rebellion, not allegiance. The more advantages you have for knowing your Master's will, the more stripes you must suffer, if you disobey it. God hath given you faculties, not only to hear, and to know, and to wish, and to resolve; but also to execute your resolutions: and he justly expects, that those executive powers should do him homage. Be ye, therefore, doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves ^b. Comply with every call of the gospel: submit to every precept. Look upon every word you hear as a rule, by which you must walk in this world, and by which you must be judged in the world to come. "Who-soever looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he not being a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed ^c." "If ye know these things, happy then are ye, if ye do them ^d."

To conclude this head, let your obedience to the form of sound words delivered you, be without exception or reserve. Do homage to those precepts which are most unpleasant to flesh and blood; and renounce those sins which are naturally dear to you, as a right hand or a right eye; and be speedy in this your obedience. Carefully observe, maintain, and improve, any good motions excited, any pious inclinations produced in you by the word. Cherish such impressions, as sparks of heavenly fire; and, while your hearts are in any degree warmed by them, hearken to the calls of heaven,

P 2

Mortify

^b Ja. i. 22.^c Ja. i. 25.^d Jo. xiii. 17.

Mortify the lusts, and forsake the sins which have been reproved ; and, without delay, exercise the graces, and practise the duties, which have been recommended.

V. Often examine how you have heard, and improved the word. Reflect, what impressions it made upon you ; what convictions you felt ; what graces you exercised ; what resolutions you formed ; and in how far you have acted answerably to them. Lament your bypast unprofitableness under the means of grace, and let a sense of it quicken you henceforth to double your diligence. Carefully search the particular cause, why the word preached hath so little profited you. The knowledge of your disease, and the discovery of the cause of it, is one good step towards a cure.

Some of you, from the directions I have given for hearing the word with profit, and from a survey of your own temper and conduct, may learn, without difficulty, why the gospel, with respect to you, hath been accompanied with little or no success. You come to the house of God, polluted and entangled with worldly thoughts and vanities, not pure and free. You suffer not your houses, your gardens, your books, your companions, to tarry behind you at the door of the sanctuary. There, a mechanic brings with him the business and cares of his calling. There, appears a merchant, tormented with anxious inquiries, What if I should lose by such a bargain ; if my ship, bound for the Levant, should be cast away, or taken by a privateer ; or if my London correspondent, deep at present in my debt, should prove bankrupt ? Yonder sits a learned man, immersed in his philosophy, his history, or his belles lettres ; or planning publications,

which,

which, vanity whispers in his ear, shall transmit his name with honour to latest posterity. One in high office, comes perplexed with the affairs of government, and with the difficulty of retaining his place: and one out of office, agitated with restless longings after preferment, or puffed up with flattering hopes of attaining it. A Herod hears John; but thinks more on Herodias, than on the preacher. Though sick unto death, men attend not to prescriptions which would infallibly remove their disease. Tell me, my brethren, is it any wonder, that the justest reasonings, and the most pathetic addresses, have no influence on your sentiments, temper and conduct, when you do not hearken to them, or reflect upon them? Is it by sloth and negligence, that just ideas, and lively impressions of divine things, are to be sought after? When days, and months, and years, are devoted to the world; think you, that enough is done for your souls and eternity, by spending a few hours, or rather minutes, in hearing a sermon, as if you heard it not? Is not the cause obvious, why the gospel hath not hitherto proved to you a favour of life unto life? Silence not the voice of conscience. Listen to her important suggestions. See, acknowledge, and bewail thy guilt. "I sat before God as his people do; but my heart went out after its darling idols. I gave no earnest heed to the things that I heard. I shut my eyes against the light. I applied not what I heard to my own case, but imagined some other more concerned in every warning and reproof. I reflected not that the voice of God was calling upon me. I was at no pains to cultivate the impressions made by sermons; and hence, they proved as a morning cloud, and an early dew, which soon passeth away. The voice of

“ the speaker rushed away as a torrent, and, with it,
“ my devotion. When the sermon was done,
“ thoughts, foreign to the subject of it, crowded
“ in upon me. I built not on the foundation it laid ;
“ I implored not the influences of the Spirit to bless
“ it : I said to convictions, Go your way for this
“ time ; when I have a more convenient season, I will
“ hear you.”

VI. If you have received any benefit by the word, ascribe to God all the glory. If, in hearing it, you have been convinced or converted ; it is God's right hand, and holy arm, which have gotten him the victory. In this conquest, you have no part. As Satan casts not out Satan ; so, corrupt nature never sincerely wills its own change and destruction. A prevailing inclination, and a desire to be free of such an inclination, are incompatible. When the highest wishes of the soul are altered, one is indeed renewed ; and he who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, is in some measure possessed of it. Regeneration, therefore, is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who sheweth mercy. If your languishing graces have been revived and quickened : it is God who restored you from spiritual wanderings, and enlarged your heart to run in the way of his commandments. If you went to the house of God weeping, and returned from it with your countenance no more sad : it was God who made you to hear the voice of joy and gladness ; so that your bones which were broken did rejoice. Give, therefore, unto the Lord, glory and praise ; give unto him the glory due to his name. Sacrifice not to your own nets. Set not the crown on the head of instruments. Honour them, love them,
pray

pray for them ; but beware of idolizing them. Acknowledge, that your attendance on ordinances would have been fruitless ; that the most pathetic preachers would never have persuaded you to believe ; that the warmest addresses would never have melted your rocky hearts, had not the blessed Spirit taken the work into his own hand. If you thus praise God for what you have already felt of the influences of his grace, he will make you to feel still more of them : and the thankful receiver of mercies, shall never want new mercies, for which to give thanks.

Such is the course you should follow, if you would reap benefit from the means of grace. You have heard these directions : it remains, that henceforth you practise accordingly. Keep thy foot, O Christian, when thou goest to the house of God. Strictly guard thy thoughts and affections in the time of hearing, and after it too. If they are not narrowly watched, vain or vile imaginations will overspread thy soul ; and suitable impressions of divine truth will have no room to take root, no moisture to nourish them. When thou comest to present thyself before the Lord, Satan also comes with thee. The moment the good seed of the word is sown, malicious spirits, swift and numerous as the fowls of the air, will endeavour to pick it up. A variety of ideas and images are stored up in the memory, which these subtle foes, aided by indwelling corruption, well know how to combine, not for our improvement, but our ruin ; just as a printer, from the cases of letters which ly before him, makes up syllables, and words, and sentences, fraught with the most licentious and impious sentiments. To hear aright, is highly difficult. To neglect hearing, or to hear amiss, is dreadfully dangerous.

With what cheerfulness would faithful ministers encounter the difficulties of their office, were their labours successful! But, when they labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought, this weakens their hands, discourages their hearts, nay, tempts them to wax weary of their work, and to resolve with Jeremiah, * “ I will not make mention of the Lord, nor “ speak any more in his name.” Infatuated and ungrateful sinners! will you break the hearts of those, who travel as in birth, that Christ may be formed in you? must they return to their Master with the sorrowful complaint, that you have finally rejected his compassionate invitations? Instigated by the tenderest affection, they watch for your souls, that they may be able to give an account of them with joy. If you force them to do it with grief, that will be unprofitable for you.

Many are the arrows in God’s quiver, by which he can punish your careless, formal and forgetful hearing. If you will not hearken to him, to hallow the Sabbath, by a serious and devout attendance on religious institutions, he may kindle a fire in the gates of this city, which shall devour the palaces thereof, and shall not be quenched †. He may avenge, by the sword of a cruel enemy, your unworthy treatment of his embassy of peace. He may recompence your contempt of the heavenly manna, by a scarcity of natural food. Or, he may deprive you of your slighted gospel privileges; your teachers may be removed into corners, and the gospel of the kingdom taken from you, and sent to a people who will better bring forth the fruits thereof. But, should our church and nation escape these public calamities, the unfruitful hearer cannot escape the

damnation

* Jer. xx. 9.

† Jer. xvii. 27.

damnation of hell. When the watchman warns the wicked of his way, to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity ^ε.

We are all of us on trial for eternity. Our eternal happiness or misery depends on our improving, or not improving, the means of grace. Now, is the accepted time. Now, is the day of salvation. This favourable season may, as to some of us, be near its period; and then, God will try us no more. The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned ^h. Barren trees may be permitted, for a while, to stand in a wilderness; but, in the vineyard of the church, God more speedily cuts them down. Even now, the axe is laid to the root of the tree; and no careless unfruitful hearer can tell how soon it may receive a commission to strike the fatal blow. He, that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy ⁱ. Know, O sinner! a sovereign remedy for thy spiritual diseases is now in thy offer; but, if thou continue to reject it, thou must perish and pine away in thine iniquities; and, as thy sin exceeds that of the heathen, so shall thy punishment exceed theirs. If the gospel secures not thy pardon, it shall aggravate thy condemnation. If it doth not advance thee to heaven, it shall cast thee down to the very lowest hell. Slighted admonitions, naturally increase thy sin and security. That, which melts and softens the heart of another, through thy wretched abuse of it, hardens thine. That, which

should

^ε Ezek. xxxiii. 9.

^h Heb. vi. 7, 8.

ⁱ Prov. xxix. 1.

should have been for thy welfare, becomes a trap and a snare unto thee. Thy fair blossoms wither. Thy seeming graces decay. For from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have ^j. Possibly some now hear me, who once felt the power of the word; but, at this moment, are as little moved as the seats under them. Once they trembled at the threatenings of the law: Now, fearless and undismayed, they run upon God's neck, and upon the thick bosses of his buckler ^k. O that such would think on these awful words, *Is. vi. 9, 10.* "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." *2 Thess. ii. 10, 11, 12.* "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." If thou now despise these warnings, it will be bitterness to thee in the latter end. Thou wilt mourn at the last, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly ^l. When thou art going out of this world, or, at the farthest, when thou art gotten into the other world; with what piercing cries, and bleeding heart, wilt thou lament thy present folly! "Had I
" hearkened

^j *Luke viii. 18.*^k *Job xv. 26.*^l *Prov. v. 11—14.*

“ hearkened to yonder faithful minister, I had never
“ come to this place of torment. He warned me of
“ my danger. He besought and entreated me to fly
“ from the wrath to come. But I would not take
“ warning. Time was, when I might have secured
“ a place in the far distant mansions of bliss. That
“ time I trifled away; and now, devouring flames
“ must be my everlasting abode.” Consider this,
ye that forget the Lord, lest he tear you in pieces,
when there shall be none to deliver you^m.

^m Pl. l. 22.

DIS-

DISCOURSE VII.

INSTRUCTIONS AND CONSOLATIONS FROM THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF CHRIST.

Preached in the High Church, Edinburgh, 13th April 1783,
on occasion of the death of the Rev. Mr ROBERT WALKER.

HEBREWS xiii. 8.

JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER.

I INTEND, first, to consider the occasion of these words ; and then their meaning, and the practical instructions they suggest.

I. I am to consider the occasion of these words. This will best appear from their connexion with the immediately preceding and following verses ; and an account of it may suggest meditations, not unsuitable to the mournful occasion of our present meeting.

1. The Hebrews had been blessed with public instructors, who had spoken to them the word of God, and who believed and lived what they taught. They were indeed vessels of honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Having in trust the ministry of reconciliation, they fainted not. They renounced the hidden works of darkness and dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, not handling the word of God deceitfully : not endeavouring

deavouring to avoid the contempt of philosophers, and the ridicule of wits, by omitting or disguising doctrines which such men accounted foolishness; but, by an open manifestation of unfashionable truths, and a bold inculcating of difficult and unpleasant duties, recommending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. They kept back from their hearers nothing profitable; they declared the whole counsel of God, and distributed to every one his due portion of spiritual food. They unfolded the deceits of the human heart. By the thunders of the law, they alarmed the secure; by the affectionate voice of the gospel, they allured men to Christ. With the tongue of the learned, they spoke words in season to many a weary soul; and, with warmth and earnestness, they inculcated the necessity of holiness of heart and life. Yet, it was not only by their doctrine, it was also by their conversation, that they shined as lights in the world, and held forth the word of life. Sincere belief of the gospel they preached, had purified their own hearts, and influenced them to a behaviour, whereby they adorned the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things. They were harmless and blameless, and demeaned themselves as children of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. They walked with God in truth and equity; and their light so shone before men, that others, seeing their good works, glorified their heavenly Father.

2. They had spoken, but now they ceased to speak the word of God. Their exemplary edifying conversation was now at an end. The place which once knew them, and which they occupied with honour and advantage, knows them no more. The lively
and

and penetrating eye is sealed in darkness ; and the tongue, which sweetly instructed, and powerfully persuaded, is now dumb. Valuable as their lives were, the wishes of thousands could not retain their spirits in the day of death. The earthen vessels, which received and communicated the gospel treasure, wear out and decay ; or, when as useful as ever, are suddenly dashed in pieces as a potter's vessel. From ministering to sinners the gospel of Christ, ministers are sometimes almost instantaneously called, to bear a part in the sublime and exalted services of glorified faints. Sorrow not for such, my afflicted friends, as those who have no hope. If your love to them were more generous and disinterested, the sorrow you feel for your own loss would be greatly mitigated by the joyful thought, that they are gone to Christ's Father, and your Father ; to his God, and your God. They have quitted the field of battle, and are more than conquerors through him who loved them. They rest from their labours, and their works follow them : and ye, who were united to them in the endearing bonds of Christian love ; ye, who valued, and profited by their ministrations, ye shall see them again ; your hearts shall rejoice, and your joy shall no man take from you.

3. Ministers, who have thus spoken the word of God, should be remembered, their faith followed, and the end of their conversation considered. By their deaths, especially when unexpected, they thus address their brethren in office : “ Remember, and copy after, “ what was exemplary in our doctrine and practice. “ Work the work of him, who sent you into the “ world, while it is day ; and learn from us, that the “ night of death hasteneth, in which no man can
“ work,

“work. Shortly, you also, must bid adieu to your
“families and congregations, and give an account of
“your stewardship. Demean yourselves so, that it
“may be with joy, and not with grief. If you can-
“not attain the eminent talents of some who have
“gone before you, emulate, at least, their faithful-
“ness and diligence. Be no more slothful, but fol-
“lowers of them, who, through faith and patience,
“now inherit the promises.”—Faithful ministers
should be remembered by those, whom the ties of
blood, alliance, or friendship, peculiarly connected with
them. The blessings derived from such connexions,
and, perhaps, long enjoyed, should not be blotted out
from grateful remembrance, even when they are re-
moved. It becomes the bereaved to say, “Have we
“received good at the hand of the Lord, and shall
“we not receive evil also? The Lord gave. The
“Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of
“the Lord.” If, now, you follow their faith, and
consider the end of their conversation; their being
parted from you for a season, may be the happy mean
of their receiving you for ever.—Ye, to whom they
have proved spiritual fathers, or whom they built
up in faith, holiness, and comfort; remember them,
with gratitude to that God who sent them to you,
and who, when they planted and watered, graciously
gave the increase.—Remember them with remorse and
contrition, ye, who, as the deaf adder, stopped your
ears, and refused to hearken to the voice of the charm-
er, though charming never so wisely. Let the sin-
ners in Zion be afraid, and let their hearts meditate
terror, who have rejected the counsel of God by his
servants, and acted as if the offers of grace and glory
were unworthy of their regard. Your case, however,
is

is not yet desperate. The death of a faithful pastor, properly improved, may issue in your spiritual life.

It is not improbable, that, when the Hebrews were called, not only to remember their spiritual guides, but to consider the end of their conversation, this may particularly refer to some of them sealing their testimony with their blood. Thus, Stephen was stoned by the Jews; James, the brother of John, slain with the sword by Herod Agrippa; and the younger James, author of the epistle, put to death by Ananus the high priest, in absence of the Roman governor. Scripture has recorded the serene, joyful, and benevolent spirit, with which Stephen suffered. And such examples were well calculated to excite others, to the same firmness of resolution, confidence of faith, and forgiveness of enemies.

4. From the caution after our text, "Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines," it would appear, that there were some, who endeavoured to turn the Hebrews aside, from that purity and simplicity of the gospel, which their deceased pastors had inculcated. Even in the primitive church, tares were sown soon after the wheat, and sprung up in abundance. Corrupt men arose, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them: and many were fatally removed, from those who called them into the grace of Christ, to another pretended gospel, which flattered the pride, or connived at the depravity of the human heart.

II. I am now to consider the meaning of my text, and the practical instructions it suggests.

One great truth contained in these words, is, that Jesus Christ always was, now is, and for ever shall remain

main perfectly the same, and, consequently, that he is God in the true and proper sense of the word, since his human nature was not, and, indeed, no created nature can be, eternal and unchangeable. The truth and importance of this doctrine, and the practical improvement we should make of it, I am not, however, now to consider. The connexion of the words, and the present occasion of our meeting, lead me to confine myself to reflections suggested, by the eternity and unchangeableness of Christ, as contrasted with the mortality of human teachers, and the changeableness of the doctrines they teach.

1. The religion of Jesus is ever the same. What it first was, it now is, and it shall be for ever. The doctrines and laws, taught by Christ and his inspired apostles, have been, are, and ever shall be, the only rule of faith and manners. Human arts and sciences, from small beginnings, by the aid of various experiments and observations, gradually improve; and in them, often, though not always, what is newest, is best. It is far otherwise with the gospel. Jesus, who was in the bosom of the Father, hath revealed, what eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had it entered into the heart of man to conceive. Hence, our ideas and representations of those deep things of God, are then most perfect, when they most exactly correspond with his instructions. The inventions of men may be bettered. Not so, the words or works of God. Hence, the precept, 1 Jo. ii. 24. "Let that, therefore, abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." In the sacred oracles, Jesus is represented as the foundation of all our hopes;
Q
and

and we are assured, that, without union with him by a true and lively faith, there is no forgiveness of sin, no acceptance with God, no holiness here, no happiness hereafter. But, in that which many writers would obtrude upon us as rational Christianity, these are represented as doctrines, which, though pardonable in our weak and well meaning forefathers, suit not this liberal-minded and penetrating age. The high character which some of those writers have acquired, as philosophers or politicians, has blinded many to adopt their theology, though excluding articles, which make a most capital and essential figure in the original records of our holy faith. There, a religion is published, not to last for one age, but while sun and moon endure, through all generations. Surely, the authors of those records understood Christianity; and it is wiser to learn it from them, than from such, who torture those records to a sense, which no candid unbiassed reader would find there, without the aid of such ingenious critics. Men must think of themselves more highly, and of the word of God more meanly, than they ought to think, who imagine, that they can make Christianity better, than the plain, natural, obvious sense of the sacred oracles, has made it. The religion of Jesus, what truly deserves that name, is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Their sagacity may be highly extolled, who boldly hazard new and uncommon interpretations of scripture, which perhaps never occurred, and, without their help, never would have occurred, to a plain and unprejudiced reader of his Bible. In the mean time, the arrogance, of pretending greater accuracy or plainness, than He who spoke as never man spoke, or, than they who spoke and wrote by the inspiration of his Spirit, though

too often a prevailing motive, will prove a sorry apology for renouncing doctrines or precepts, sanctioned by the natural sense of the sacred oracles.

It has been pled, that the manly age of Christianity, and late riper advancements in philosophy and good reasoning, justify another method of instruction, than that used by the apostles in the infant state of the church. But, do they justify deviations from the apostolic doctrine? Have the words, faith, salvation, justification, conversion, and others which often occur in the New Testament, acquired another sense in the 18th century, than they had in the first? In the first century, faith signified a strong and lively trust in the declarations and promises of God. Are we now to understand by it, the whole of religion and virtue? Paul taught, that, by the works of the law, ceremonial or moral, natural or revealed, no flesh living can be justified. Have we now found out, that his assertions were too generally laid, and that his meaning only was, we cannot be justified by the least important branch of the law? Are we saved by another faith, than that which saved the immediate disciples of Christ, and which those great and good men taught their hearers? Since the apostolic age, are men born with other and better dispositions, so that they can plead their own innocence and virtue at the divine tribunal, and no longer need to approach God through a Mediator? Have we discovered, that repentance and reformation sufficiently entitle us to the favour of God, and that there is now no occasion for Christ as a propitiation or advocate? The foundation of such dangerous delusions, is plainly this: "The genius of our refined and improved age, has found better means for knowing the mind and will of God, than

“ those inculcated, who claimed to be immediately
“ taught of God, and guided by his Spirit into all
“ truth, and who supported those claims by the most
“ astonishing miracles! A set of wonderful men have
“ appeared, to correct the mistakes of the disciple who
“ lay in Christ’s bosom, and of the disciple who was
“ transported into the third heavens; though, un-
“ fortunately, they have not yet agreed, what should
“ be substituted in the place of a John or a Paul’s an-
“ tiquated and obsolete instructions!”

2. The kind and benevolent affections of Jesus are the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Dispensations of Providence may wear a frowning aspect; clouds and darkness may be round about the Saviour, and hide, from his ransomed ones, the pleasant light of his countenance: still, however, the love of his heart never expires, never diminishes.—In the days of his humiliation, he came to seek and to save that which was lost, and to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He kindly received even the greatest offenders, who applied to him; and assured them, “ him who cometh to me, I will in no ways cast out.” When he rose from the dead, the men who imbrued their hands in his blood, were the first to whom he enjoined, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name. Thou, who now groanest under the yoke of thy transgressions, fear not to apply to this holy One of God, though thou hast long heard of Him, and yet despised Him, and lived in deliberate presumptuous rebellion against Him. The benevolence which he manifested, when he received sinners and ate with them, he still retains, and ever will retain.—On earth, he patiently bore with the weaknesses and infirmities of his disciples, and was

often

often obliged to repeat his salutary warnings and reproofs. Fear not, therefore, that his long-suffering and forbearance are exhausted, thou, who art deeply humbled, because thou hast so badly improved all the pains he has taken with thee, and because the evil dispositions, for which he has so often rebuked thee, by his word, by his providence, and by his Spirit, are still so strong. The love of men changes into hatred, when they are injured; and few can forgive such, who have repaid, with ingratitude, their former favours. Not so the Redeemer. The apostle, who had repeatedly denied him, was the first of the twelve to whom he showed himself alive after his passion. Thou, then, who, like Peter, bitterly bewailest thy transgression; despond not, as if thou hadst no more portion in the Son of God, nothing more to hope from the bowels of his compassion. When thou canst not look up to Him, he looks upon thee with a pitying eye. Thy disquiet, thy remorse, thy trembling applications to a throne of grace, are proofs that He, who prayed for Peter, hath also prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.—When himself a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, he tenderly sympathised with, and generously relieved the necessities of others. He pitied the multitude who had continued with him three days, and had nothing to eat. He hastened to heal the diseased, and spent his life in going about doing good. In his now exalted state, if thou, O friend of Jesus, art in sickness, in poverty, in anxiety, in anguish of spirit, he earnestly remembers thee still. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. In all thy affliction, he is afflicted with thee; he will not suffer thee to be tempted beyond what thou art able to bear; and his corrections shall speedily cease,

when their end is gained. Formerly, when thou called upon him in the day of trouble, thou experienced his compassion. He hath not now forgotten to be gracious; or, in anger, shut up his tender mercies. He, who hath delivered, and doth deliver, will yet deliver.—So intense was his love to enemies, that he shed his blood to reconcile them to God. Will he then forsake his friends, and deny them necessary help and strength, when weak in themselves, and exposed to many and dangerous trials? He redeemed them from the curse of the law, and shed abroad his love in their hearts, when they were alienated from him in their hearts, and by wicked works: and will he take away from them his loving kindness, now that they believe on his name, value his favour, and can appeal to him with Peter, Lord, thou who knowest all things, knowest that I love thee? No. The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. Marvellous loving kindness! which bears with creatures so froward, depraved, inconstant, and prone to backsliding; which, for their redemption, endured the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; and which now heals their backslidings, restores their souls, and recovers them from their spiritual wanderings!

3. The power of Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The hearts of many, take little part in the wonderful works of Jesus. They read of them in the sacred records: they view them as past events, a return of which, it were vain to expect. But, though that mighty arm is not now exercised in the same visible manner, as once it was, on the bodies
of

of men, its energy is still undiminished. The outward miracles wrought, when the Son of God tabernacled among us, were intended, not only to confirm his doctrine, but to be images and proofs of what he can do, and will do, for the souls of all, who apply to him for relief. Thou, therefore, who art painfully conscious of thy spiritual blindness, think, how Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, who cried, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me ! Thou, who feelest thyself dead in trespasses and sins, believe, that he who raised Lazarus from the dead, can inspire thee with a heavenly and divine life. Though Satan dwell in thee, and reign over thee, by envy, by pride, by voluptuousness, or by covetousness ; He, who cast out devils from those whose bodies were possessed with them, can deliver thee from the usurped dominion of the prince of darkness, and destroy in thy soul the works of the Devil. If multitudes of blinded Heathens, and profligate Jews, became eminent and exemplary for holiness of heart and life ; that grace and power, which produced in them so happy a change, is still the same, and shall be bestowed on every one, who applies to Christ for it, with a humble confidence. Thou hast read, how a Stephen, how James the brother of John, how James the younger, and many others, in ancient and modern times, with fortitude and patience, submitted to a painful and shameful death, for the testimony of faith, and of a good conscience. Say not, it is impossible, that I, weak and timid as I am, should, like them, stand fast in such an evil day. If these martyrs quitted themselves like men, and were strong, it was through the grace that is in Christ Jesus ; and that grace is as able as ever, to inspire with fortitude the feeble and faint-hearted. Rest therefore assured, that,

if he calls thee to extraordinary trials, thy shoes shall be as iron and brass; and, as thy day is, so shall thy strength be. Days of excruciating pain, or overwhelming sickness, were appointed to some of thy fellow Christians: and their resignation was as remarkable as their distress. Something within whispers, How could I, like them, thus acquiesce in the disposals of infinite wisdom, and glorify God in such a furnace of affliction? Reflect, that he who strengthened them, is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He can therefore also strengthen thee with all might in the inner man, to all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.—Are they increased, who trouble the church of God; and are they, who rise up against her, many? Her Redeemer is strong; the LORD of Hosts is his name. His hand is never shortened, that it cannot save. In her darkest nights, she hath encouragement to plead: “Awake, awake; put on strength, O arm of the LORD! awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it, that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it, which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?” *Is. li. 9, 10.*—“I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. Thou art the God who doest wonders; thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.” *Pf. lxxvii. 11, 14, 15.*—You think on a deceased saint; you admire his character; yet almost esteem it presumptuous to aspire after, at least to hope to reach, his religious attainments. “Oh! how shall I, as he did, boldly enter in at the strait gate,

“ gate, and walk undaunted in the narrow way that
 “ leadeth to life? I have no might of my own, to re-
 “ move the difficulties, and to subdue the enemies,
 “ which oppose my journey to Emmanuel’s land.”—
 Doubting and desponding soul, hearken to the oracles
 of God. The LORD, the Creator of the ends of the
 earth, fainteth not, neither is weary. My grace is
 sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in
 weakness. With God, all things are possible. The
 LORD shall defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and
 he that is feeble among them, shall be as David, and
 the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of
 the LORD before them.—Are ministers removed, who,
 by the eminence of their gifts and graces, shone as
 stars of the first magnitude? The counsels of hell,
 and the gates of the invisible world, shall not prevail
 against the church. Though all flesh is as grass, and
 all the glory of man, as the flower of grass; though
 the grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth a-
 way, thy Saviour is ever the same: His word, which,
 by the gospel, is preached unto you, endureth for
 ever; and his Spirit is as able as ever to render it ef-
 fectual. “ Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look
 “ upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall va-
 “ nish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old
 “ like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall
 “ die in like manner. But, my salvation shall be
 “ for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolish-
 “ ed;” Is. li. 6. Lover and friend may be removed
 from us, and our acquaintance into darkness. Mini-
 sters, much esteemed, and whose labours were signally
 blessed, may not be suffered to continue, by reason of
 death. But the LORD, who can repair, or compen-
 sate these losses, still liveth: and it becomes us to
 sing,

sing, even in such nights of adversity, "Blessed be
"my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be mag-
"nified!"

I persuade myself, many have been applying a great part of what I have said, to the heavy breach made upon them ten days ago. What you have lost, I cannot sufficiently express. And, was I more equal to the subject, my own feelings, and the feelings of many who hear me, forbid my undertaking it. Indeed, the uncommon concern for Mr Walker's death, not only in this congregation and city, but wherever the mournful tidings have reached, are a testimony of his distinguished worth, more decisive than the eulogiums of a friend, and more striking than the most eloquent praise. I therefore need not enlarge. Yet, saying a little, may be proper.

His father, a clergyman, equally respected for a sound understanding and an honest heart, by his prudent and diligent attention to the affairs of the Society for propagating Christian knowledge, preserved their funds from utter ruin. The God of grace poured his Spirit on his seed, and his blessing on his offspring. Two sons, whose hearts were knit together in brotherly and Christian love, were honoured to preach the unsearchable riches of the Saviour, on whom they believed.

Your late worthy pastor, the elder brother, was first settled at Straiton, in the presbytery of Ayr. Even in that early period of his life, he was considered as a singularly edifying and useful preacher. Possessed of a quick apprehension, a lively imagination, a fruitful invention, a solid judgment; of talents for elocution, which would have shone in any civil department;

partment; and of that ready wit and delicate humour, which must have insured them a favourable reception: he renounced the prospects of honour and wealth, which thus opened to his view. What things were once gain to him, he counted loss, for the glory of his Saviour, and the good of precious souls. Prompted by just ideas of religion, and deep experience of its influence, he preached, not as pleasing man, but God who trieth the heart. Every thing which would gain him applause, he carefully avoided and suppressed, if it was not also calculated to recommend to perishing sinners, Christ the Saviour, and Christ the Lord. The reputation, however, which he courted not, soon placed him in more important and difficult stations ^a. There, the rank, genius, and learning, of many of his hearers; their sincere piety and steady attachment to the truth as it is in Jesus; and their taste, formed by his worthy predecessors and colleagues in the ministry; made it no easy task to support his character. As a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid, it was exposed to the most minute and critical inspection. Yet, he was enabled, honourably to support it to the last period of life. Indeed, none could censure the matter of his sermons, who wished not to banish from the pulpit, either, on the one hand, the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, or, on the other hand, man's duties to God, to his neighbour, and to himself. The style of his sermons was plain, yet elegant: warm and pathetic, yet rational and argumentative. Though some might equal him in the useful matter of their sermons; and others, in particular beauties of composition: it was generally acknowledged, that few have appeared, in whom the
different

^a In South Leith, 1746; and in the High Church, Edinburgh, 1754.

different excellencies of an edifying preacher, were more conspicuously united. The learned author of the history of Manchester, in the dedication to a volume of serious discourses on death and judgment, just published, takes notice, that "the multiplicity of English sermons, which have issued from the press the last fifty years, are purely didactic in their plan, and merely sentimental in their execution: not affectionate, not impassioned. They play round the head, but they come not to the heart. Or, if they sometimes come to it, it is not in those strong strokes, in those deep and awful gashes, which constitute the very essence of effective oratory, and which the elevated spirit of the gospel is so directly calculated to give." This may be true of many late printed sermons, elegant, accurate, and, in other respects, not without their use. The censure, however, appears to me, too generally laid; and, I am persuaded, that candid critic would not have involved in it the printed sermons of your late pastor, if they had fallen in his way, but would have acknowledged them well calculated to strike the conscience, and to impress the heart.

I need not tell you of Mr Walker's irreproachable, circumspect, and exemplary life. Some of us will long recollect, with painful pleasure, what he was as a relation, a counsellor, a friend. Yet, one feature of his character permit me to point out, which, though less generally known, thirty-six years intimate, familiar acquaintance, enabled me to observe, and which administers reproof to most Christians, and instruction to all. The best on earth are imperfect, and often have weaknesses, unperceived by themselves, yet lamented

mented by their friends, and exposed by their enemies. These greatly tarnish and obscure their real excellencies, and render their conversation less agreeable, and their lives less useful, than they would have been otherwise. It was the reverse with your deceased pastor. His weaknesses were few, inconsiderable, and little perceived by others: yet, by his own penetrating eye, clearly discerned, and carefully watched over. Seldom have I known the minister, or the man, who had greater cause to glory in his infirmities, while the power of Christ was made manifest thereby, and to say, Where I am weak, there am I strong. His natural temper was warm and hasty; and all know how difficult it is to keep under such a temper, and to bring it into subjection: but, by divine grace, he overcame that weakness, and maintained, when tempted to anger, a spirit unruffled and serene. If he was less bustling, active, and enterprising, than some others: this hindered not his improving and exercising the important talents with which God had endowed him. Indolence betrayed him not to serve the Lord with that which cost him nothing; to neglect preparation for the ministrations of the sanctuary, or to slacken his endeavours of growing in the divine life, and in fitness for his office, by reading, meditation, and prayer. Learn from him, my respectable hearers, that no temper, no constitution, excludes eminence in religion, in morals, in intellectual improvement, and usefulness to mankind: and that every different natural bias may be so directed or curbed, as, instead of thwarting, to promote the great ends of life.

Such was the man whom God hath taken, and who, in less than two hours after instructing the church on earth,

earth, was suddenly removed to the higher worship and service of the general assembly and church of the first born.

The residue of the Spirit is with Him, who made our dear friend so excellent a Christian, and a minister of the gospel. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he may send faithful, able, and successful labourers into the harvest; and that vacancies, here and every where, may be supplied with pastors after his own heart, who shall feed his people with knowledge and sound understanding.

They who have spoken the word of God, are no more; and we, who speak it, soon shall be silent in the grave. Death has again and again bereaved our churches of those, who were the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof, her glory and defence. Sooner or later, he will repeat such awful strokes; and perhaps may again repeat them, when we dread it least. Yet, for my friends and brethrens sake, for the house of God the Lord, I will say, “ Distant be
“ the day, when your much esteemed and beloved
“ pastor, when our dear younger brethren, and when
“ the few who survive in this city and neighbourhood
“ of our venerable and worthy fathers, shall be taken
“ from their families and churches. Long may their
“ bow abide in strength! May their latter end, and
“ may ours, greatly increase, in faith, in holiness, in
“ usefulness! May we all have a happy meeting with
“ one another, and with those who now sleep in Je-
“ sus, in the heavenly Zion! and, may our hearers
“ remember, that the time cometh, when the seats
“ they now occupy must change their owners, and
“ ministers must no longer direct to them the gracious
“ calls

“ calls of the gospel ! In this their day, may they so
“ know and improve the things which belong to their
“ peace, that they may never be hid from their eyes !
“ and, while they have the light, may they walk in
“ the light, lest darkness come upon them, when no
“ man can work ! ”

DIS-

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE AGENCY OF GOD IN HUMAN GREATNESS.

Preached 16th June 1793, being the Lord's Day after
Dr WILLIAM ROBERTSON's death.

I CHRONICLES XXIX. 12.

—IN THINE HAND IT IS, TO MAKE GREAT.

I HAVE not chosen these words, to celebrate the greatness of my deceased colleague. A formal proof of what all acknowledge, would be as absurd as arguing, that yesterday the sun shone, to those who yesterday saw his light, and felt his warmth. It would be more useful to describe, how he acquired, and how he manifested, his greatness. But, even that, would be a task, fitter for the historian than the preacher; and in which, perhaps, none could succeed, whose delicate taste, sound judgment, and correct and elegant style, did not resemble those of our great historian. My design is, to lead your attention to divine agency in human greatness; a subject, which, through the blessing of God, may both confirm your faith, and regulate your practice. “The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure in them ^a.” And surely, this work of the God of nature and providence, is none of the least of them; and, as it well merits, will amply reward, our humble search.

God

^a Pl. cxi. 2,

God bestows on some of the human race, greatness, compared with their fellow men, though not absolute and unlimited greatness. If the talents of none were great, or if the talents of all were equally so, many departments, necessary, or highly important to society, would remain unoccupied. One man, by the sweat of his brow, provides food and raiment, and dwelling sufficient for himself and family, and for accommodating neighbours and strangers, who, in return, supply him and his household with other necessities or conveniences. For those purposes, labour must be directed by some degree of genius and skill. Much superior abilities are requisite in those, who watch over the tranquillity and happiness of states, who enact wise and good laws, who steadily execute them, and who impartially examine complaints against their transgressors. Such services to society cannot be performed, without considerable degrees of penetration, of activity, and of firmness of mind. Distinguished courage and conduct, are often necessary for repelling the assaults to which states are exposed, by the violence of foreign or domestic foes. They too must be great, who invent or improve useful arts, who remove or soften the distresses of others, who enlighten their understandings, and who influence their wills and affections. It is not however fit, that every individual, or that even the greater part of mankind, should possess all, or even any of those various kinds of greatness. Society could not subsist, unless the lower departments of life were filled, as well as the higher; and they could not be filled at all, at least they could not be filled with so much comfort, if Providence made all men equal in wisdom, in strength, in taste, in genius.

Let me now point out a few instances of divine agency, in raising to greatness some of the human race.

1. God makes men great, by bestowing upon them distinguished genius and talents. Some of the courtiers of the emperor Sigismund, who had no taste for learning, inquired, why he so honoured and respected men of low birth, on account of their science? The Emperor replied, "In one day, I can confer knight-hood or nobility on many: in many years, I cannot bestow genius on one. Wise and learned men are created by God only." No advantages of education, no favourable combination of circumstances, produce talents, where the Father of spirits dropped not the seeds of them, in the souls which he made. A principle must exist, before any human skill, or fortunate incident, call forth that principle into action. It is God who giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them who know understanding ^b. He is pleased to make a difference in mens intellectual powers, as well as in their outward circumstances. The faculties of some are weak, and carry them a little way in receiving, comparing, or recollecting ideas. The strong and vigorous minds of others, easily acquire, and faithfully retain, every thing worthy of knowledge and remembrance. On one, God bestows a lively and extensive imagination: on another, extraordinary measures of acuteness, penetration, and judgment: on a third, astonishing powers of raising the passions, and influencing the conduct, by an animated and persuasive address. These talents, which distinguish one man from another, are as really the gift of God, as those excellencies of body or mind, which distinguish

^b Dan. ii. 21.

distinguish the human race in general from the brute creation.

It cannot be denied, that men may be high in rank, and advanced to honourable and important offices, on whom God hath bestowed no distinguished talents. But their exalted station cannot render them truly great. Honour is not seemly for a fool. As "a gold ring in a swine's snout" conceals not her ugliness: so, preferment hinders not meanness and worthlessness from appearing: nay, rather, it renders them more conspicuous, like a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid. "He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool," or committeth any business to his management, "cutteth off the feet;" depriveth the message or business, of what was as necessary to its progress and success, as feet are necessary for walking: and thus, he "drinketh damage:" his business miscarries, his schemes are disappointed, and mischief is the fruit of his blind, ill-founded confidence. "As he that hideth a stone in a sling; so is he that giveth honour to a fool." As he is not innocent of the murders committed by a madman, whose rashness or inattention furnished him with deadly weapons: so, he, who entrusts an interesting matter to one unfit for managing it, is accessory to all the harm which flows from that unfitness. Dignity and authority disgrace the men who know not how to use them; and are a reproach to those to whom such men owe their advancement.

2. God makes men great, by an education, and by events in life suited to discover, to excite, to encourage, to improve, and to direct their talents. The accomplishments of one, who has enjoyed, and in some

R 2

measure

* Prov. xi. 22.; xxvi. 1, 6, 8.

measure improved, a good education, far excel those of a savage, perhaps born with much superior natural talents. The most luxuriant soil, when uncultivated, often becomes wild and barren ; while a soil less favourable, richly recompenses the seed sown, and the labours of the husbandman. Early instruction and discipline correct the blemishes, brighten the polish, and increase the excellencies of genius. Sagacity, when not excited, assisted, and directed, seldom chooses the right path, or soars high in the pursuit of science. Excessive severity breaks the spirits ; and a fond and foolish indulgence suffers genius to take a wrong bias, and to run riot. The ignorance, avarice, or ambition of parents, often thrust their children into lines of life where they are useless or hurtful, and deprive the public of the benefit which otherwise it might have derived from their talents. Happy the youth of genius, whose parents have wisdom and leisure to discern its peculiar bent, to cherish its early blossoms, and to water and cultivate this planting of the Lord ; and whose teachers, instead of a pompous display of extensive learning, or acute and subtle reasoning, impart instructions, whereby the understanding may be improved, and the heart and life made better. Wisely did Nebuchadnezzar provide a three years course of instruction, in what might qualify the children of the Jewish nobility for important offices civil or military : especially as he himself carefully examined their diligence and progress, that he might advance them according to their merit ^d. Schools are seminaries for church and state. And, as a garden plentifully stored with fruitful trees, cannot preserve its beauty and use, unless tender trees are reared in nurseries,

^d Dan. i. 3—5. ; 18—20.

series, to supply those decayed by age : so, a community cannot remain safe and prosperous, where there are not schools, in which promising youths may be trained, for supplying the stations and offices of those, who are not suffered to continue by reason of death. The friends and companions of our early youth, contribute not a little to the strengthening and improving our natural talents. “ As iron sharpeneth iron ; so doth the countenance of a man his friend ^e.” When genius is blunted, a friend’s company, conversation and example, give it a new, and a keener edge. One’s delight in knowledge is increased ; and his diligence in acquiring it, is animated by that of another. When the cast of genius, and bent of inclination, are similar ; and, as face answereth to face in water, so the heart of a man to a man : the exertions and efforts of one are as burning coals, to inflame and cherish those of another. But other favourable providences, as well as able and diligent instructors, and virtuous, studious companions, expand the faculties, call forth exertions, and discover the extent of talents, which otherwise might have lain dormant, or shone with less lustre. Erpenius the critic, was first stimulated to a proper improvement of his time and talents, by looking into Fortius Ringelbergius’s treatise on study : and Franklin, the philosopher and statesman, was similarly affected, by an essay of Dr Cotton Mather, on doing good ; a copy of which (from which several leaves had been torn out by a former possessor) he happily purchased and read ^f. Poverty and disappointment

R 3

depress

^e Prov. xxvii. 17.

^f This circumstance, Dr Franklin mentions in a letter to Dr Sam. Mather, Dr Cotton Mather’s son, dated Passy, 12th May 1781,

depress the spirits, damp vigour of thought, check boldness of effort, and nip in the bud the rising genius. Prosperity and affluence allure to luxury and dissipation, and prevent the acquiring distinguished abilities, or employing them with diligence and wisdom. It is a common observation, that great occasions produce great talents. It may be justly said, that they excite, cherish, and display to advantage, talents, which, without these occasions, might have descended to the grave, unknown to the possessors, and not observed, or even suspected, by those around them. A Frederic and a Washington, might have lived obscure, and died forgotten, had the time, place and circumstances, which called forth their abilities, been different. Some, who earn a scanty subsistence, by carrying burdens, or by following the plough, might have brightly shone, at the court or camp, or in the republic of letters, if some happy incident had timeously discovered their latent powers, and if due encouragement had roused their activity. Pride of birth

1781, and which I transcribed from the gazette of the United States, 28th November 1789. Another anecdote from the same letter, may perhaps be both acceptable and useful. "The last time
 " I saw your father, was 1724. On my taking leave, he showed
 " me a shorter way out of the house, through a narrow passage,
 " which was crossed by a beam over head. We were still talking
 " as I withdrew, he accompanying me behind, and I turning to-
 " wards him, when he said hastily, *stoop, stoop!* I did not under-
 " stand him, till I felt my head hit against the beam. He was a
 " man who never missed any occasion of giving instruction; and,
 " upon this, he said to me, *You are young, and have the world be-
 " fore you. Stoop, as you go through it, and you will miss many hard
 " thumps.* This advice, thus beat into my heart, has frequently
 " been of use to me: and I often think of it, when I see pride
 " mortified, and misfortunes brought upon people, by their carrying
 " their heads too high."

birth and voluptuousness, stimulated and supported by wealth, have sunk many in deserved contempt, who, if, in early life, their outward circumstances had been poor and mean, might successfully have aspired to true greatness. He whose reputation at the bar was inconsiderable; when advanced to the bench, has proved its bright ornament, and displayed abilities, which, till then, modesty had veiled, or want of suitable opportunities, concealed.

3. It is God who implants dispositions, and excites to conduct, which enable men to improve their natural abilities, and providential opportunities and advantages for becoming great. Men of slower and more narrow faculties, through industry and attention, often outstrip those of livelier fancies and more brilliant talents, who, trusting in them, forget their need of study and application. "Seest thou," says Solomon, Prov. xx. 29, "a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men." In the intellectual as well as moral world, "to him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away, even that which he seemeth to have ^d." Exercise and activity, marvellously improve and increase talents comparatively small: while talents originally greater, through indolence and neglect, languish and decay.—Further, God makes men great, by influencing their tempers, and enabling them to govern their spirits, and conduct their lives, by the rules of reason and religion. "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city ^e." He is truly great, who carefully suppresses angry, envious, and resentful passions; habitually

R 4

^d Luke viii. 18.^e Prov. xvi. 32.

tually resists every impure, intemperate, or unjust inclination ; watchfully attends to the state of his soul ; suffers not his tenderest feelings, and keenest wishes, to allure him from the path of honour and duty ; from reverence and love for his God and his Saviour, acts with fitness and propriety, despises the reproach and contempt of a blinded world, accounts it a light and little thing to be judged of man's judgement ; who, in his religious and moral deportment, steadily follows the light of conscience, but condescends to the sentiments and humours of others in matters indifferent. The man, who indulges his appetites and passions, uncontrouled by religious principle ; whatever is his learning, or wealth, or power, is a little man. Strength of genius and eminent talents are often darkened and enfeebled, sometimes utterly extinguished, by the tyranny of passion and appetite. If they occasionally burst forth, their exertions are not steady and regular. The vices of many, hinder their uninterrupted and successful pursuit of the grand objects, which, had they been virtuous, their distinguished capacities qualified them to reach.

4. God makes men great, by bringing them into difficult and trying situations, which exercise and manifest the greatness of their disposition and talents. It is not easy, in a flow of prosperity and honour, to be humble, modest, unassuming and affable. Men of exquisite sensibility, are often disordered and unhinged by the slightest affront, and sink under the calamities of life. He is great, who, when visited by heavy trials, racking pain, or bitter provocations, is, notwithstanding, composed and serene, patient and resigned. He is truly great, who is not enticed from the paths of virtue by the allurements of honour, of riches,

riches, of ease, of pleasure, or of power; and who sacrifices to public good, every mean, narrow, interested prospect. Death is a period, which often tries characters, throws over them light or shade, and ascertains the measure of worth and excellence. I say, often: for, sometimes, great and good men are in their last moments subject to bondage; and men, neither great nor good, have no bonds in their death. Yet, surely, he who sees the importance of an eternal and unchangeable state, and yet beholds its near approach without terror; he who trusts, that the God who prospered him in this world, will in the world to come make him completely happy; who rejoices that he was in any degree useful, but looks for acceptance only through the merits of Jesus: such a one is strong, when nature languishes and decays. He is more than a conqueror, who encounters the king of terrors undismayed, and can take up the challenge, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?"

5. God makes men great, by rendering the exertions of their talents acceptable and useful. Unjust and uncandid as it is, it is by no means uncommon, to overlook distinguished virtues and abilities, and only to view the comparatively inconsiderable blemishes and weaknesses with which they are accompanied. "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.^f" "For every right work a man is envied of his neighbour.^g" And what men envy, they make no scruple to decry or depreciate. When providence frowns on the man of talents, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread

^f Ecclef. x. 1.

^g Ecclef. iv. 4.

“ bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill ; but time and “ chance happeneth to them all ^h.” Deep penetration, and unwearied diligence, though combined with the strictest integrity, is not always crowned with success. If men are great in reputation, as well as in the good qualities which deserve it ; if they possess that good name, which is better than precious ointment ; if future generations rise up and call them blessed : all this must be ascribed to divine providence. Without this, original genius, extensive learning, correct taste, and sound judgement, will not appear with such lustre, as commands general honour and respect. It is from the blessing of God, that virtuous and amiable dispositions are observed and acknowledged, excite esteem, attract affection, and communicate delight. Great is their influence on the sentiments of others, who are thus regarded and beloved. To adopt their opinions, imitate their manners, and listen to their counsels, is a tribute cheerfully paid to their merit. In larger or smaller societies, superior sagacity and abilities, secure, without violence, and without resistance, respectful homage, and an authority almost absolute. The gentleness and affability of one great man, captivates every heart ; and the steady, manly fortitude of another, stems a torrent of folly or vice.

6. It is God, who assigns to the great, the sphere of their greatness. High measures of different excellencies are seldom united in one man. Often remarkable intellectual or moral defects, impair their reputation, and diminish their usefulness, whose illustrious talents had acquired high honour, and extensive fame.

^h Eccl. ix. 11.

fame. A lively imagination often hinders the labour and attention necessary for a successful search after truth, and for reaching eminence in learning. The firm and steady are not always the courteous and affable. They who affect to display an universal genius, and to shine in every branch of science, by aspiring at too much, lose all; and apply and exert themselves to no purpose, because they apply to no one thing with sufficient constancy. They, therefore, are in the fairest road to become great, and to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, who chiefly devote themselves to pursuits, for which their talents are best adapted. Even those of the greatest worth, are in every religious and moral attainment not equally conspicuous. Providence bestows on none that boundless range of genius, which would secure them a power and influence, dangerous to the general interests of society. If the tastes and talents of great men, were equally suited to every branch of knowledge, no branch would be so much cultivated, improved, and enriched with new and important discoveries, as it is by an attention confined to one or a few branches. Besides, by this distribution and limitation of talents, one great man needs and receives benefit from the inventions and exertions of another; mutual intercourse of good offices is maintained; and various sources are opened, of that esteem, attachment and gratitude, by which happiness is so highly promoted. The man richest in strength of genius, and in acquired knowledge, while he imparts to many, derives from others sublime pleasure. Desires are gratified, wants supplied, improvements advanced, and joy communicated, in a variety of kinds and degrees, which could

not

not take place, did every great man possess the same talents.

Greatness often appears in sentiments, feelings and exertions, which respect the affairs of a present life, when no greatness is discovered in the esteem, choice and prosecution, of the more excellent things, which are unseen and eternal. In this, Divine agency must be acknowledged. God hides those things from the wise and prudent, from men of bright natural talents and acquired accomplishments, and reveals them to babes, to men of duller capacities, and of a less liberal education. Indeed, the outward means of spiritual knowledge are equally accessible to both : and God neither excites, in the wise, prejudices against religion ; nor deprives them, where religion is concerned, of the exercise of their rational powers. But on many of them, he bestows not a spiritual discernment, of the truth and importance, and of the glory and excellency of divine things ; suffers them, unrestrained by his grace, to abuse their sagacity in finding out objections against religion ; and brings them into circumstances, which, through their own fault, increase their blindness, inattention and unbelief. Though, in this awful dispensation, divine sovereignty must be adored ; yet footsteps of wisdom and rectitude, may sometimes even now be also discerned. The sons of worldly wisdom, often, day after day, deliberately and presumptuously do the evil and abominable thing which God hates. They cast contempt on the Saviour, do despite to the Spirit of grace, and love darkness rather than light, because their hearts and deeds are evil. God is not obliged to reclaim such unprovoked enemies and rebels, by the gracious influences of his Spirit ; and is not unrighteous, when he

he leaves them to eat of the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices. What they chiefly relished and sought, they succeeded in gaining. Much important instruction is conveyed by these proceedings of providence. The triumphs of the gospel, appear the effects of divine power, not of human wisdom or eloquence. The influence of depravity appears, in darkening the understanding and perverting the judgement, even where penetration in other matters is greatest. The wise are made sensible of their need of divine teaching; and the ignorant and weak are encouraged, in the use of means, to look up for them. God manifests, that in accomplishing the purposes of his providence and grace, he needeth not the services of the best qualified, and can bless and prosper the efforts of instruments less promising. Those, who, we imagined, would have been the first to discern the truth and excellency of the gospel, are often the last; and those, who, we dreaded, would have been the last, are the first. Be not then too much alarmed, at the genius, learning, and powers of persuasion, by which scepticism, infidelity, and dangerous heresies are often supported: and fear not, that the gospel treasure perish, though put in weak and earthen vessels. Yet, beware of abusing this doctrine. Head knowledge is not inspired, but acquired in the use of means; neglect of which, aggravates guilt, and increases danger. The parent and teacher use means for instructing youth, without certainty that these means will succeed; and in this they act reasonably. By the blessing of God, that ignorance and depravity, which, without their efforts, would have remained, are happily removed. It is madness to neglect, what is absolutely necessary for securing

securing happiness, and averting misery ; though something further may be necessary, which depends not on our exertions, but on the blessing of heaven.

7. In the hand of God it is, to limit the duration of human greatness. The distinctions on which the most exalted of mankind value themselves, are transient and uncertain. The pre-eminence acquired by genius, sometimes secretly and slowly decays : and sometimes is suddenly darkened by the appearance of a genius still superior. Human greatness, when it has reached a certain point of height, begins to descend. The causes which once elevated the great, now operate to raise another above him. They who have reached the pinnacle of human glory, lose their ability or motives for exertion, and fall into obscurity and forgetfulness, through the successful efforts of others to acquire similar distinctions.—But, never do we see more clearly, that there is an end of all perfection ; and, never do we feel more deeply, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit : than, when death has dominion over men truly great. In removing from the world, the prudent, the ancient, the eloquent, and the honourable : the voice of Providence to survivors is, “ Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils ; “ for wherein is he to be accounted of ? ” — “ His “ breath goeth forth, he returneth to his dust : in “ that very day his thoughts perish. Happy, there- “ fore, is the man, who hath the God of Jacob for “ his help ; whose hope is in the Lord his God i.” The great and the wise die, as well as the fool and brutish person. No man hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit in the day of death. There is no discharge in that warfare ; and, by the brightness of his

i Is. ii. 22. ;—iii. 1—3.

i Ps. cxlvi. 4, 5.

his talents, no man can prevail, to prevent, or, even to delay, the execution of the sentence: "Dust thou art, and to the dust thou shalt return." The man of most distinguished abilities, may be racked with pain, and weakened by disease, and must be conquered by death; as well as he who knows not his right hand from his left. This is the end of all men. However great they once were, the dust must cover them; the worm must feed upon them; and the place which once knew them, and admired them, and was under their influence, must know them no more.—How, then, should we hate sin, the evil one, and the enemy, who has brought on the most esteemed and beloved of the human race, all this misery and destruction! How highly should we value, and how earnestly should we seek, a name and a place in those upper courts, where sorrow, and sickness, and death, can never enter! They, who now act the most honoured and distinguished parts on the theatre of the world, soon must go the way whence they shall not return; and, in a course of years, the remembrance of many of them will cease. But the glory of the faithful servants of God, fades not, when they die. In a better country, even those of them, who lived and died neglected or despised, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever.

Suffer me, now, to lead you to the practical improvement of what I have said on the agency of God in human greatness.

1. I begin with addressing those, whom the hand of God hath made great.—Whatever knowledge you have acquired, whatever virtues you possess, and, to whatever honours you have been advanced; remember,

ber, that by the free, sovereign, unmerited favour of God, you are what you are. Adore the goodness, which bestowed on you such valuable faculties, and such distinguished advantages for their cultivation and improvement. Never forget, that the disposals of Providence, or the influences of grace, are the source of all that is truly great. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights ^k." Think not, therefore, of yourselves, more highly than you ought to think. Seriously reflect on the Author of your greatness. "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and, what hast thou, that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ^l?" Let not, therefore, the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the orator, in his eloquence, nor the honourable man, in his fame; but, let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord.—Maintain a habitual sense, that, as you derive your greatness from God, you are accountable to God for the use of it. Gain the affection, or, at least, command the respect of your inferiors, by moderation, affability, and condescension. God made you great, for the general good, and not merely for your own pleasure or profit. God endued you with sagacity and genius, for a better purpose, than misleading the judgments, and corrupting the hearts of your fellow men; and for a higher and nobler end, than affording you agreeable amusement, or gratifying your passion for applause. Distinguished talents were bestowed, that, with success, you might guide others to wisdom, to religion, to happiness; that you might mitigate distress, instruct ignorance, and direct perplexity,

^k Ja. i. 17.^l 1 Cor. iv. 7.

plexity. Even in this world, you will find the labour, anxiety, and self-denial, with which you pursue these pious and benevolent designs, amply recompensed, by the pleasure of knowing, that God's glory, and the good of mankind, were your sincere aim; and that your exertions for promoting them, were not in vain in the Lord. Yet, alas! to many, who have favourable opportunities for gratifying benevolent affections, these pleasures are unknown. They pervert to idle or hurtful purposes, the fine abilities, which, rightly employed, would lessen the miseries, and increase the joys, of their fellow men. Such prostitution of your noble powers, though it may excite admiration, will neither secure esteem, nor captivate the heart. God, by bestowing upon you distinguished genius, calls you to generous and elevated designs. Discharge, therefore, with dignity, disinterestedness and honour, the trusts to which your talents have raised you; and thus spread around you, religion, peace, and joy. Let it be your ambition to discharge every duty which your offices require. Does thy lofty station tempt thee to despise thy inferiors, or to treat them with insolence and scorn? Remember, that thou needest their aid, and dependest more upon them, than they do upon thee. Wretched wouldst thou become, though they should not hurt thee, if they withdrew from thee their necessary support.

2. Let me next address those, whom a scanty measure of natural talents, or acquired accomplishments, confines to a lower, and more ignoble, and laborious line of life. Beware of envy and discontent. Do you repine, that you have not the genius of a great man, and cannot aspire to his honourable rank? This is as absurd and criminal, as to repine that you are men, and not angels. "Should the thing formed, say to

S

" him

“ him who formed it, why hast thou made me
 “ thus ^m ?” Inferior stations, though accompanied
 with much hardship, and little honour, are as neces-
 sary for the general good, as the most eminent sta-
 tions. The allotments of Providence, at which, pride
 and selfishness murmur, are kind and wise. If you
 desert the post assigned you, and attempt to devolve it
 on another, whose education has not fitted him for
 performing the duties, and bearing the inconvenien-
 cies of that post, you rebel against the Ruler of the
 universe. In your present meaner department, you
 are useful: but, from want of suitable talents and
 preparation, you could do little service, probably
 might do much hurt, in that more exalted station to
 which you eagerly aspire.—Imagine not, you would
 be happy, could you exchange your condition with
 his, whom the hand of God hath made great. Per-
 haps the height he has reached, kindles or inflames a
 tormenting ambition to ascend still higher. Nothing
 possessed pleases, when a roving imagination perceives
 something desirable, not yet attained. Where the
 gain of godliness and contentment is unknown, all
 situations are embittered, by restless repining labour.
 The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled
 with hearing.—In the mean time, let the brother of
 low degree, rejoice that he is exalted. The highest
 honour, the most solid and substantial greatness, is
 equally open and accessible to all. A high way con-
 ducts to it, in which the wayfaring man, though a
 fool, shall not err. Those, despised as the filth of
 the earth, and the offscourings of all things, may,
 notwithstanding, be as a crown of glory in the hand
 of the Lord, and as a royal diadem in the hand of
 their God.—Still you ask: Is it criminal to wish to be
 greatly

^m Rom. ix. 20.

greatly useful? No. But it is criminal to strive with your Maker, what shall be the sphere of your usefulness. Encroach not, therefore, on the province of another: clog not his exertions: hinder not his usefulness. Diligently, faithfully, and steadily, discharge the duties of your own station. Improve, to the best purposes, the gifts of nature and of Providence, and thus manifest your gratitude to the giver. Injure not society, and proclaim not your own folly, by coveting a station for which you have no capacity. Prefer public, to private interest: and exchange not your present situation for another more easy or honourable, but in which you could contribute less to the welfare of society. There is little cheerfulness or enjoyment, without health: and the labours and restraints to which your station subjects you, tend to secure health, by promoting temperance and exercise. If mean circumstances exclude from many comforts, the prospect of bettering one's situation by honest industry, is no small comfort: and when there appears no probability of acquiring greatness, desire of it is seldom violent.

3. But there is another source, from which envy and discontent more abundantly flow.—Perhaps a competitor outshines you, in accomplishments which your rank, your office, your business, your genius, or taste, lead you chiefly to cultivate: and you plead, it cannot be criminal, earnestly to covet the best gifts, the gifts best for you in particular, and which may qualify you for discharging, usefully and honourably, the duties of your station.—I condemn not your cultivating such accomplishments, and wishing for higher measures of them. Your wishes, and the studies or labours to which they instigate you, are a part of your duty, provided they are accompanied with resignation to

the will of God. Far be it from me, to censure a generous emulation; ardour to excel in what is truly excellent; and vigorous efforts to equal, and even to surpass, the fairest and brightest models.—Yet, I would show you a more excellent way. Cultivate that charity which envieth not. Dost thou affect to despise and depretiate the perfections of another in thy own line of life; and wouldst thou gladly destroy and annihilate them, were it in thy power? Now walkest thou not charitably. The extensive knowledge, the noble and elevated designs, the bright genius, the distinguished talents, from which thousands, and tens of thousands, derive useful instruction, or innocent entertainment, cannot grieve thee, if thou love thy neighbour as thyself. And if thou dost not thus love him, the love of God dwelleth not in thee. Mean and sordid is his soul, who thinks himself wretched, impoverished, and disgraced, by the superior intellectual enjoyments or honours of his brother. If thou art tormented, because the approbation, esteem, and respect, is bestowed upon another, which that other justly merits; thou art tormented, because multitudes are pleased, and grateful, and just. If, from pious and benevolent motives, thou desirest distinguished talents; from these motives, rejoice that others possess them, though you do not. If the superior talents of thy neighbour are abused, thou hast cause to pity and pray for him: if they are employed for the glory of God, and the good of mankind, it becomes thee to bless God on his behalf. Imitate, so far as thou canst, what is great and noble in thy neighbour. If thou canst not reach his accomplishments, rejoice in them, as if they were thine own: and, content with the lit-

the which God bestows upon thee, carefully improve it for his glory.

4. To conclude.—Let all be exhorted, to give honour, to whom honour is due. Are men raised up, who are the beauty and ornament of civil, of religious, or of literary societies? Acknowledge and adore the hand of God in this, and be suitably thankful. Does a great man fall? Deep sensibility, mourning for our loss, humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and serious attention to the vanity and uncertainty of worldly distinctions, are seasonable and becoming exercises. Surely, when the bodies of such are laid in a grave, their memories ought not to be buried in forgetfulness. Though the counsels and arms of Abner, for a considerable time, opposed, with success, David's obtaining the government of the ten tribes; yet, when that brave general was treacherously slain, the generous prince bitterly laments his sad and untimely fate, throws a veil over what was amiss, and extols what was great in his character. Detestable is that bigotry and party spirit, though, alas, not uncommon, either among those distinguished for zeal, or those who wish to be thought moderate men, which destroys the feelings of humanity, steels the heart against the dictates of justice, and is too blind to discern, or too dishonest to acknowledge, the excellencies of those, whose sentiments and conduct, especially in matters which appear to them important, happen to be opposite to theirs.

APPENDIX.

PART OF A SERMON,

Preached previously to the foregoing one, but on the same Day, from 2 Peter i. 11—14.

With HISTORICAL ADDITIONS,

Intended to illustrate some Observations in said foregoing Sermon on 1 Chron. xxix. 12.

YOU need not be told, my dear hearers, the suitability of the subject, which I have shortly and imperfectly handled on this mournful occasion. The death of one, near thirty years your minister, calls you to imitate whatever was laudable and exemplary in his temper and conduct, and to recollect and improve whatever was useful and important in his pastoral instructions.

His death is, to me, a solemn and striking call, whatever my hand findeth to do, to do it speedily, and with all my might. Our age was nearly equal. Our acquaintance commenced 1737, at the humanity class in Edinburgh college, then taught by Mr John Ker^a; and,

^a Mr Ker had peculiarities in his manner of teaching: and, perhaps, from an enthusiastic passion for the books he explained, sometimes imagined elegance and force of expression, where there was none. Yet, great was his merit, in gaining the affection of his scholars; and great his success, in exciting and directing their study of the Latin classics.

and, from fondness for the same studies, soon produced intimate familiarity, and impressions of mutual regard. This was one circumstance which prevented from degenerating into personal rancour and animosity, the opposite sides we afterwards took in debates about church government, in the political questions of the American war, and Popish bill : and even our different sentiments, as to some points of religion and morals ; as to the propriety of preaching at all, or preaching frequently on certain subjects ; and, as to the fittest and safest method of explaining and inculcating, what we were agreed, was necessary to be taught. Often, with painful pleasure, I recollect the agreeable, and, I hope, not idle and useless, hours, which, almost sixty years ago, we spent in each other's rooms, and sometimes under the hospitable roof of his uncle-in-law, Mr William Adam. He was ordained minister of Gladsmuir, in the presbytery of Haddington, and I of Kirkintilloch, in the presbytery of Glasgow, May 1744. He was admitted minister of Lady Yester's, and I of the New Grayfriars church, in this city, June 1758 : and, since July 1767, we have been colleague ministers of this church.

He was descended from the Robertsons of Gladney ; many of which family have been remarkable for good sense, for acute and penetrating geniuses, and for distinguished eminence, in their different lines of life.

His father, Mr William Robertson, was minister, first at Borthwick, in the presbytery of Dalkeith, next in Lady Yester's, and then in the Old Grayfriars, in this city. He and his wife, Mrs Eleonora Pitcairn, of the Dreghorn family, died the same week. Though in circumstances far from affluent, he grudged no proper expence in the education of his children ; the hap-

py effects of which, appeared in his lifetime, and, still more, after his death. His courteous and engaging manner, and his frankness and ease in conversation, rendered him highly agreeable and useful, both to his own family, and to the young people who visited them. As a clergyman, his character was respectable. He was esteemed a Calvinist divine, and a useful practical preacher. Liberality of mind gave a place in his library, which, though small, was well chosen, to authors, whose scheme of divinity, and ideas of the most profitable manner of preaching, were very different from his own; and what might be learned from them, he candidly pointed out to his son. Probably, from this circumstance, my late colleague contracted his early and high esteem, for the works of Le Blanc, Limborch, the younger Turretine, and especially Werenfelsius^b: and afterwards adopted some of their peculiar sentiments and modes of expression, not relished by many Calvinists. Rash, however, and unjust it would be, to infer from this, that he approved those of their leading opinions, plainly opposite to the Westminster confession. He constantly discouraged schemes for abolishing or altering the subscription to that formulary, required of ministers and preachers of the church of Scotland, though suggested or supported by men, whose characters he respected, and who had ability and inclination to assist his measures of church policy. To young men entering on the study of divinity, who asked his advice, he usually recommended Vincent's explanation of the Westminster

^b He particularly admired Werenfelsius de Logomachiis eruditum, et de meteoris orationis. He thought the false sublime exposed in the last, might have been amply exemplified in passages from Lord Shaftsbury.

Westminster Assembly's shorter catechism, as an excellent comprehensive view of the doctrines and duties of Christianity. I need not observe, that Vincent has given a scriptural account of justification through imputed righteousness, and other important articles of faith, very different from that of some of the above mentioned foreign divines.

Intimate acquaintance with the Greek and Latin classics, furnished him with a rich fund of instruction and entertainment; improved his fine and delicate taste, and trained him for composing in the clear, easy, and manly style, of those great models of eloquence.

Edinburgh college then abounded with youth of conspicuous talents, and indefatigable application to study; many of whom, afterwards, rose to high eminence in the state, in the army, and in the learned professions, especially the law department. Well conducted literary societies were, indeed, at that time, less frequent, than they have since become. One companion, however, stimulated and aided another, in the pursuit of knowledge; and able and diligent teachers encouraged and directed their efforts.

Hitherto, little had been taught in the logic class, unless dull and dry distinctions, and the doctrine of syllogisms. These, and other things, in the old logic, useful, if not for discovering truth, at least, for the more easily detecting and confuting error, Mr (afterwards Dr) John Stevenson, professor of logic, did not discard. But he attempted, and attempted with success, greater things. A morning hour he spent in reading, first a book of Homer's Iliad, then Aristotle's art of poetry, and lastly, Longinus on the sublime; and illustrated the beauties of the first, and
the

the rules of the two last, by apposite passages from Greek, Latin, French, and English authors. I need not say, how entertaining and useful this part of his course must have been, when the college had no professor of eloquence. In the forenoon's hour, he prelected, first on Heineccius's logic, then on Bishop Wynne's abridgment of Locke's essays, and on Devries's metaphysics. An afternoon's hour was employed three days of the week, in prelecting on Heineccius's history of philosophy. Thus, the elements of criticism were taught by striking examples, rather than by intricate precepts. The steps were traced, by which some had investigated truth, and by which others had been betrayed into error. Youth were excited to observe and imitate the excellencies, and warned to avoid the blemishes, of celebrated writers. The acuteness of students was exercised, by impugning a philosophic thesis: and discourses were prescribed on subjects connected with eloquence, logic, metaphysics, and the history of philosophy, that they might learn to apply the rules of composition.

Dr (afterwards Sir) John Pringle, taught at the same time the moral philosophy class. His lectures were not on so large a scale. He entered not into curious disquisitions on the foundations of morality, or on the progress of society; and soon dispatched what he chose to say on pneumatics and natural religion. Perhaps his thoughts were not always arranged in the best method, and perhaps his style was sometimes careless and unpolished. But these defects were more than balanced by his excellencies. His lectures were calculated for doing good, not for a display of his talents, or for gaining applause. They led his hearers to acquaintance with the world, and

to

to the knowledge of their own hearts. They taught what dispositions and conduct were good and just, wise and honourable. So far as reason gave light, they delineated the paths by which individuals and families might probably reach safe and innocent enjoyments, and states acquire and preserve prosperity; warned against the dangers to which human virtue and happiness are exposed, and recommended various means for repelling them.—Generously unwilling to grasp the honour, to which, in his opinion, another had a juster claim, he often illustrated and confirmed his important remarks on morals, on œconomy, on government, and on police, by reading long passages from Plutarch, Montaign, Charron, Bacon, Sidney, Harrington, Moleſworth, and others.—To those, with whose proficiency he was best satisfied, he prescribed discourses, sometimes in English, sometimes in Latin. Every one was allowed to compose on natural religion, morals or politics, as his genius and inclination prompted. But, the particular subject was determined by lot. Many from other classes attended the delivery of these discourses. That great encourager of the study of the classics, and of moral and political science, Dr William Wishart, Principal of the College, often honoured these discourses with his presence, listened to them with attention, criticised them with candour; and, when he observed indications of good dispositions, and discerned the blossoms of genius; on these occasions, and afterwards, as he had opportunity, testified his esteem and regard. Professors Stevenson and Pringle were equally attached to those of their students, who in any measure merited it, and often invited them to spend a morning hour with

with them, when the conversation was chiefly directed to literary subjects.

Gratitude to instructors, whose memory is dear to me, and who, perhaps, had some influence in encouraging and directing Dr Robertson's very extraordinary talents, is my best apology for this long digression.

Other causes, however, beside academic instruction, now roused the genius of North Britain. Scotsmen, of wealth and influence, favoured opposite sides, in the political questions keenly agitated about the end of Sir Robert Walpole's administration. The speeches of Argyle, Carteret, Chesterfield, Walpole, Pultney, Littleton, Polworth, and others, in both houses of Parliament, were read with avidity; and many a young reader caught their manly animated manner. The Court of Session was then adorned by a President Forbes and a Lord Arncliffe; and the bar, by a Craigie, a Fergusson, and a Lockhart, who well knew how to convey sound reasoning, in clear and persuasive language.

The state of pulpit eloquence, at that time, requires a fuller discussion than would be proper on this occasion. Some sons of the clergy, unjust to their worthy fathers, ascribe to Dr George Wishart the honour of first introducing to our pulpits, a rational, accurate, and useful strain of preaching. Surely they could not be ignorant how much the writings are still admired of Leighton, Scougal and Dunlop, who lived and died long before the amiable Doctor. I acknowledge, the cruel persecution after the Restoration, obliged many ministers to preach with little study, and with little accuracy. Afraid they might never enjoy another opportunity of addressing their beloved hear-

ers;

ers; they often crowded a vast variety of matter into one discourse. The multitude, too, of their divisions and subdivisions, would have blunted the force of truth, had not an uncommon measure of divine influence accompanied and blessed their honest and hazardous labours. After the Revolution, from habit they often retained a manner of preaching, which had no longer the apology of necessity. In this, they were too much imitated by some of the next generation, who justly valued their piety and zeal. By degrees, however, the good sense of a large proportion of our clergy, and their acquaintance with the best compositions of English divines, both of the church and dissenters, corrected those blemishes, improved their taste, and convinced them that the charms of truth might be concealed by a sordid and slovenly dress. About 1730, a few young ministers and preachers, avoiding a negligent style, and an unnecessary multiplying of heads, were betrayed, by a blind admiration of Lord Shaftsbury, into the opposite extreme, of pompous, florid, and ill connected harangues. Happily, however, this slimy taste was soon checked; not only by the contempt and displeasure of the greater part, both of ministers and people, but by the translation of Fenelon and Rollin's writings, and the just sentiments of eloquence which they inculcated. From these, and other causes, about the time of Dr Robertson's academical education, and immediately after it, perhaps as much as at any period, a great part of the ministers of Edinburgh, and of the country, endeavoured, with success, to gain the attention and esteem of their hearers, not to themselves, but to the glorious truths and duties which they taught. Perhaps, few of them equalled

Dr

Dr George Wishart, or Dr Patrick Cumming, in an easy, fluent, neat and elegant style : Dr Cumming, in extensive historical and critical knowledge, judiciously applied for the purposes of instruction and edification ; Dr Webster, in a tender, pathetic address ; and Dr Wallace, and Dr William Wishart, in depth of thought, originality of genius, and the art of gaining attention to the most common and necessary subjects, by new reflections, illustrations and arrangements ^d. But many of those, from unwearied study, both of the doctrinal and practical part of the sacred oracles, from acquaintance with the human heart, and Christian experience, though less admired as polite or as popular preachers ; yet feeling what they preached, kept back from their hearers nothing profitable, and approved themselves workmen who needed not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of life. It is to be regretted, that the modesty of those excellent men has deprived posterity of the edification which it might have received from their writings : so that Crawford's Dying Thoughts, and Zion's Traveller, Bannatyne's Mistakes about Religion, and Maclaurin's posthumous sermons and essays, are almost the only larger publications of divines of those times, to which I can appeal in

^d I shall give two instances. Dr Wallace, on week-day evenings, preached several sermons on the permission of evil, in which, depth of thought, and plainness of language, were equally conspicuous. Dr William Wishart, to whose abilities and worth, less justice has been done, than to those of his brother, preached, 1746, a course of sermons in his own church, on the new birth. What he said of the change, made by regeneration, on the understanding, will, and affections, I do not recollect ; but I well remember in how beautiful and interesting a manner he illustrated the change made on self-love, the social principle, and other springs of action in the human heart. The Doctor was unjustly accused of heresy, for maintaining, that true religion is influenced by higher motives, than self-love.

in proof of what I have now observed. The evangelical strain of Boston of Errick, and some of the first leaders of the secession, is, indeed, justly valued by many serious Christians of almost all denominations. Their works, however, would have been more generally read, and probably proved still more extensively useful, had they avoided blemishes of style, now become less common, than in the end of the last, and beginning of the present, century.

Few minds were naturally so large and capacious as Dr Robertson's; or stored, by study, experience, and observation, with so rich furniture. His imagination was correct, his judgment sound, his memory tenacious, his temper agreeable, his knowledge extensive, and his acquaintance with the world and the heart of man very remarkable.

Liveliness of thought, clear and distinct conceptions, quick recollection of ideas, and ease in comparing or contrasting them, qualified him to bear so wise, pertinent, and entertaining a part, in conversation, that he was often the spirit and life of company. Yet, he knew too well the value of time, to waste, in unprofitable visits, hours which he could more honourably and usefully employ: and he knew too well the decorums of his station and character, to please, by improper freedoms, the thoughtless and gay. Nor did he, in company, pompously display his learning, treat those of inferior genius with arrogant contempt, or introduce subjects, in which he would have shone unrivalled, and others present could have taken no part.

His speeches in church courts, were admired by those, whom they did not convince, and acquired and preserved him an influence over a majority in them,
which

which none before him enjoyed : though his measures were sometimes new, and warmly, and with great strength of argument opposed, both from the press, and in the General Assembly. To this influence, many causes contributed. I might mention, besides, his talents as a public speaker ; his firm adherence to the general principles of church policy, which he early adopted ; his sagacity in forming plans ; his steadiness in executing them ; his quick discernment of whatever might hinder or promote his designs ; his boldness in encountering difficulties ; his presence of mind in improving every occasional advantage ; the address with which, when he saw it necessary, he could make an honourable retreat ; and his skill in stating a vote, and seizing the favourable moment for ending a debate, and urging a decision. He guided and governed others, without seeming to assume any superiority over them : and fixed and strengthened his power, by often, in matters of form and expediency, preferring the opinions of those with whom he acted, to his own. In former times, hardly any rose up to speak in the General Assembly, till called upon by the Moderator, unless men advanced in years, of high rank, or of established characters. His example and influence encouraged young men of abilities to take their share of public business ; and thus deprived moderators of an engine for preventing causes being fairly and impartially discussed. The power of others, who formerly had in some measure guided ecclesiastical affairs, was derived from ministers of state, and expired with their fall. His remained unhurt amidst frequent changes of administration. Great men in office were always ready to countenance him, to cooperate with him, and to avail themselves of his aid.

But,

But, he judged for himself, and scorned to be their slave; or to submit to receive their instructions. Hence, his influence, not confined to men of mercenary views, extended to many of a free and independent spirit, who supported, because they approved his measures; which others, from the same independent spirit, thought it their duty steadily to oppose.

Deliberate in forming his judgment, but, when formed, not easily moved to renounce it, he sometimes viewed the altered plans of others with too suspicious an eye. Hence, there were able and worthy men, of whom he expressed himself less favourably, and whose latter appearances in church judicatories, he censured as inconsistent with principles which they had formerly professed: while they maintained, that the system of managing church affairs was changed, not their opinions or conduct. Still, however, keen and determined opposition to his schemes of ecclesiastical policy, neither extinguished his esteem, nor forfeited his friendly offices, when he saw opposition carried on without rancour, and when he believed that it originated from conscience and principle, not from personal animosity, or envy, or ambition.

In study, or in business, he could strain every nerve, and endure long and difficult application. His ministerial work, his office as principal of the college, and the many church affairs which he conducted, prevented not his allotting much of his time to literary researches, and to preparing for the press the historical works, which have acquired him so high and so deserved reputation. Strangers might naturally conclude, that he had no other business to interrupt or divert his attention from collecting and arranging materials for his elaborate works, and clothing his narra-

T

tives,

tives, descriptions, and reflections, in language, where ease, energy and beauty, are equally conspicuous.

Envy, though sometimes loud and liberal in extolling those, whose distinguished honours were gained by attainments, after which she never aspired; artfully depreciates their merit, who, in the paths where she pursues fame, are her chief and most successful competitors. Our historian, who needed not these low dishonest tricks, for building his own reputation on the ruin of another's, saw, acknowledged, and admired, the beauties in the histories of a Hume, a Voltaire, and a Gibbons. Blinded by the excellencies, and overlooking the defects and blemishes of their composition, he even sometimes, in a manner too warm, and with too little reserve, bestowed upon them that praise, which their careless and partial representations of facts, and their unjust and malevolent attacks on Christianity ^c, would have vindicated him in withholding.

For several years before his death, he seldom wrote his sermons fully, or exactly committed his older sermons to memory, though, had I not learned this from himself, I could not have suspected it; such was the variety and fitness of his illustrations, the accuracy of his method, and the propriety of his style. His discourses from this place were so plain, that the most illiterate might easily understand them, and yet, so correct, that they could not incur their censure, whose taste was more refined. He did not wander from his subject,

^c Dr Maqueen's letters on Hume's history, Dr Finlay's vindication of the sacred books, Lord Hailes's inquiry into the secondary causes which Mr Gibbons assigned for the rapid growth of Christianity; contain clear proofs of this charge: not to mention Whitaker, and other able English writers.

subject, or handle it superficially, though he often improved incidental occurrences for the purposes of edification. Sometimes he preached on the evidences of Christianity, or some of its peculiar doctrines: but more frequently on the various duties of religion, on their difficulties, and on the helps for performing them. His expository lectures, though they might appear less laboured than his sermons, were perhaps more useful. In those on the Gospels, Acts, and some of the lesser epistles, he exhibited a variety of characters, partly for caution, partly for imitation: represented in a striking light the proofs of Christianity, resulting from the instructions, exhortations, or miracles, which he explained: and often availed himself of those opportunities for showing that the divinity and atonement of Christ, the depravity of human nature, the insufficiency of repentance and reformation to expiate the guilt of sin, and to purchase the divine favour, and the necessity of the influences of the Spirit, were doctrines clearly asserted in the sacred oracles; and that the scriptures urged against them, admitted an easy and natural interpretation, consistently with their truth. Yet, I am persuaded, few of his expository lectures were heard with greater pleasure and profit, than those on the book of Proverbs. They judiciously described the snares and allurements by which error and vice deceive their votaries, and prevent their hearkening to the counsels of heavenly wisdom. They contained exhortations, warnings, and reproofs, highly important to all, but peculiarly necessary to those entering on the journey of life. I regret that he seldom preached on passages in that book. Sermons on subjects, which his sagacity, experience, and historical knowledge, peculiarly qualified him for

discussing, would have given him opportunity of a deeper search into the extent and usefulness of religious and moral maxims, which, when expounding a large passage of scripture, he could only hint.

Though, from his earliest to his latest years, he devoted much time to thinking, to reading, and to composing; yet, this did not sour his temper, blunt his relish of social and domestic comforts, or unfit him for the common duties of life. To his family and friends, he was the delight of their cheerful hours, and the soother and comforter of their sorrows. They gratefully remember what they once enjoyed in him, and deeply lament what they have now lost. May the all-sufficient God be a friend to those, from whom a dear friend and acquaintance has been taken away, a father to the fatherless, a husband to the widow, and the orphan's stay!

His learning had no tincture of pedantry. Far from affecting to know, what he was ignorant of, or vainly aspiring after universal learning, he confined his studies to branches of science, for which his genius best qualified him, or which his station and office in life rendered necessary.

He enjoyed the bounties of Providence, without running into riot; was temperate, without austerity; cheerful, without levity; condescending and affable, without meanness; and, in expence, neither sordid nor prodigal. He could feel an injury or affront, and yet bridle his passion; was grave, not fallen; steady, not obstinate; friendly, not officious; prudent and cautious, not timid.

He bore the severe and tedious distress, which issued in his death, with remarkable patience and serenity, and with expressions of gratitude to God, for the ma-

ny

ny comforts with which, for a long series of years, he had been blessed. Among these, he mentioned to me, with peculiar emotion, the tender affection of his wife and children ; their kind and sympathizing attention in his hours of languishing and pain ; their respectable characters in life, and the comfortable situation in which he left them. In one of his last conversations with me, he expressed his joy in reflecting, that his life on earth had not been altogether in vain ; and his hopes, that, through the merits of Jesus, the God, who had so signally prospered him in this world, would, in another, and better world, be his portion and happiness.

T 3

DIS.

DISCOURSE IX.

IN THREE PARTS.

THE PEOPLE OF GOD CONSIDERED AS ALL
RIGHTEOUS.

Preached at Glasgow, April 1745.

ISAIAH lx. 21.

THY PEOPLE ALSO SHALL BE ALL RIGHTEOUS *.

PART I.

GLORIOUS things are spoken, in this chapter, of the city of our God; of the wealth and riches of the New Testament Zion; of the respect which was to be paid her, even by those who were once her greatest

* These three sermons, were designed as warnings against the delusions of the mere Moralist, on the one hand; and of the Enthusiast and Antinomian, on the other. It was soon whispered, that certain expressions in them were intended as reflections against some truly respectable characters. Even their general strain, was represented in a most disadvantageous light to several in Glasgow, who had not heard them, and still more, in places distant from that city. The Author, for his own vindication, published them the next month after they were preached, and precisely as they were delivered. The censures thrown out against them, speedily subsided; and many, who had rashly credited them, were now convinced that they were ill-founded and unfair. Perhaps, there is as much occasion for republishing them 1798, as there was for composing and preaching

est enemies; of the peace and happiness she was to enjoy under the divine government and protection; and of the multitude of those, who were to become her citizens. Those views of the church of God, are painted to us in so beautiful and lively colours, as can scarcely fail at once to attract the wonder, and excite the joy, of every sincere disciple of Christ. But, who are the members of this blessed community? What is the character, and what are the marks, of those thrice happy persons? "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place?" Who can justly lay claim to the privileges of God's people, both in this, and in a better world?—To this important inquiry, our text affords a satisfying answer, "Thy people shall be all righteous." How glorious a character is this! and how noble a source of satisfaction and delight! Well, indeed, may those "greatly rejoice in the Lord, and their souls be joyful in their God, whom he hath clothed with the garments of salvation, and covered with the robe of righteousness. They are precious and honourable in the sight of God, a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God ^a." Though, to carnal

T 4

men,

preaching them 1745. By adding new illustrations and reasonings, and leaving out sentences less necessary, they would have appeared in a dress fitter for public view. But it would have been unjust to the accusers, to have rendered sentiments and language more guarded, and less liable to exception, than when they incurred their blame. One paragraph, however, is expressed more cautiously, which gave no offence when preached, but which the author was convinced, by a worthy friend, now deceased, might easily convey a sentiment very different from what he intended.

^a Isa xliii. 4. & lxii. 3.

men, they may appear as the filth of the world, and the offscourings of all things; yet they are accounted the excellent ones of the earth, by all who know how to prize men and things according to their true worth and value. Such having a right and title to the divine favour, and being in some measure made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, may therefore die in hope of the glory to be revealed; and rest assured, that, when they leave the church below, they shall join that triumphant assembly above, who are employed in singing praises to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. But it must be of the greatest importance, to consider in what sense the people of God are all righteous; that, by applying these marks to ourselves, we may be able to judge whether we are among the happy number.

Upon inquiry, it will appear, that the word "righteous," as describing character, in scripture language has quite another meaning, than what many now affix to it; those only having that honourable title given them in most passages of holy writ, who have an imputed righteousness to found their claim to heaven, an inherent principle of righteousness to qualify them for the enjoyment of it, and who give evidence that this is their true character, by abounding in the outward fruits of righteousness to the divine praise and glory. In these respects, the people of God are all righteous.

I. The people of God are all righteous, as they are all interested in the righteousness of Christ Jesus. Without a title to heaven, and a righteousness to found that title, we can have no well-grounded hopes of ever arriving there. This, then, is the first thing

to

to be inquired after, Wherewithal shall I appear before the Lord, and present myself before the most high God? How shall I, sinful dust and ashes, dare to approach the Lord, and lay claim to his favour and approbation? Without question, in a state of innocence, this title was to have been acquired by the perfect and perpetual obedience of our first parents; not indeed that they, in a proper sense, could merit any thing at the hands of God; but because God was graciously pleased to bind himself by covenant, that upon condition of this their obedience, they should be crowned with a glorious reward. But, that it is now become impossible to obtain a title to life in this way, may be easily proven,

That there is such a thing as sin, and that this is at least in some degree blameworthy, is so plain and evident, that even those who pretend to deny it, abundantly discover, that in their denial they are unsincere, by the bitter complaints they make against others who affront and injure them, and, in return for favours, treat them with ingratitude, treachery, or contempt.

Of the degree of punishment which sin may deserve, men must needs be incompetent judges in their present corrupt state. So natural is it for our affections to bias our judgment, and bribe our reason, that it is no wonder, when sin has polluted the one, that it should proportionally pervert the other also. How different are the views of the demerit of sin, which accompany different degrees of wickedness on the one hand, or different degrees of holiness on the other! And with what ease and indifference can one person indulge himself in that, which another cannot even think of, without detestation and horror! From this fact, we may reasonably conclude, that a Being,
who

who is himself infinitely holy, is the fittest to judge of the evil of sin.

This circumstance should reconcile us to what scripture teaches us of the guilt of sin, and of the justice of God in threatening and inflicting the severest punishments, even though we should not be able, by our own reason, to perceive such evil in it as the word of God assures us there is; seeing God cannot but see the evil of sin in a truer light than we can do; and the ends and designs of his government, which none of us can pretend thoroughly to penetrate, may possibly require that sinners should be treated in quite another manner than their own corrupt reason would be apt to suggest. But we need not insist upon this, since reason itself demonstrates the truth of what scripture has taught us on this point.

If there is any evil in sin at all, that evil arises from its irreconcilable opposition to certain obligations we were under. The higher, then, these obligations are, the evil of counteracting them must be the greater. The more a being deserves to be loved, honoured, and obeyed, the greater must be the guilt of refusing him either love, or honour, or obedience. But God is infinitely worthy of all these; and consequently, to deny them to him, must carry in it an infinite guilt, or, in other words, deserve an infinite punishment.—Some have alleged, that this way of reasoning would equally prove that there is an infinite value in holiness, since that too has an infinite object. But, in reality, the argument from parity of reason will carry it in the reverse. For the evil of disrespect, is in proportion to the obligations that ly upon us to the object offended; which obligations are most evidently increased by the dignity and excellency of that object, and the mean-
ness

ness and inferiority of the person guilty of the offence. But the value of obedience or respect, rises in proportion to the value of the person who yields it; and the less that is in our case, the less is our respect and obedience worthy of notice and regard, seeing, in giving that, we can give no more than ourselves; so that our obedience is worthless, and not worthy, in proportion to the distance betwixt God and us.—It has likewise been objected, that to suppose sin infinitely heinous, is to make all sins equally so, seeing it is impossible any degree of blame can be more than infinite. But this will only prove that all sins are equal, with respect to that aggravation which arises from the worthiness of the object offended; but does not hinder some sins to be more heinous than others in other respects, and consequently in these respects worthy of greater punishment. And thus, too, a punishment may be infinitely dreadful, by reason of its continuance, and therefore in that respect incapable of increase; when yet it may become vastly more terrible, by an addition of new kinds, or new degrees, of torment and pain.

These considerations serve to show, that any the least offence deserves an infinite punishment; and, if such a punishment is deserved, it may, in a consistency with justice, be inflicted. For, how can it be unjust to treat one according to his desert? And, if God, in a consistency with justice, may inflict such a punishment; what certainty can we have, that it shall not in fact be inflicted? Must not a sense of guilt fill the conscience of the sinner, if it is not fast asleep, with the most melancholy apprehensions of divine vengeance? He knows he is necessarily under a law to God, a law of perpetual obligation, resulting from the dignity of the
divine

divine nature, and the unalterable relation between God and man. He knows that this law is holy, just, and good: He knows that the law is spiritual, and the commandment exceeding broad; taking cognizance of every thought, word and action; and strictly forbidding even the least appearance of evil. He knows it is equally impossible for this law to be abrogated or dispensed with, or even the obligation of one of its precepts to cease, or in any measure to be relaxed. He knows, I say, that this is equally impossible, as it would be for God to quit his throne, and cease to be holy. A righteousness, therefore, answering the purity and perfection of that law, he must needs have; seeing God will never justify the sinner in a way that shall eclipse the glory of the law, and cast a cloud upon his spotless purity and awful justice. “Far be it
 “ from God that he should do wickedness, and from
 “ the Almighty that he should commit iniquity. For
 “ the work of a man shall he render unto him, and
 “ cause every man to find according to his ways ^b.”
 “ If we sin, then he marketh us; and will not,”
 without a suitable reparation of the honour of his
 law, “acquit us from our iniquity ^c.” “God is of
 “ purer eyes than to behold evil; and cannot look
 “ on iniquity ^d.” “God is jealous, and the Lord
 “ revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious: the
 “ Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and
 “ he reserveth wrath for his enemies ^e.” How de-
 plorable, then, must the condition of those be, if not
 interested in a better righteousness than their own,
 who, so far from yielding complete obedience to the
 divine law, are chargeable with the breach of every
 precept;

^b Job xxxiv. 10, 11.

^c Job x. 14.

^d Hab. i. 13.

^e Nahum i. 2.

precept; and where shall such be provided with a righteousness, in which the justice of God shall acquiesce?

Can we find it in ourselves? Are there any dispositions inherent in us, or any actions performed by us, upon which we can found our title to pardon of sin, and acceptance with God? "The bed, alas! is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. Judgement will God lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away such refuges of lies ^f." "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags ^g." In many things, we offend all: and there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not. Our hearts are depraved and corrupted; and our best obedience can never rise higher than the spring from whence it flows. "How then can man be justified with God? or, how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" Could we even obey the law perfectly for the future: yet, what atonement could this make for a past offence? Paying a new debt, will never procure a discharge for an old one. Even one transgression, renders the sinner infinitely guilty in God's sight, *i. e.* infinitely hateful to him, and infinitely the object of his displeasure and wrath. God, therefore, can never justify the sinner, from a regard to the excellency or goodness of any qualification, or act, or course of acts of his own; for, God beholding him as he is in himself, his goodness must be viewed by God as put in the scales with his hatefulness and guilt; and his guilt being infinite, and his goodness but finite, the latter

^f Isa. xxviii. 17. 29.

^g Isa. lxiv. 6.

latter bears no proportion to the former, and has no worthiness to balance it.

These have been the sentiments of the most holy servants of God in all ages. Nehemiah, chap. xiii. 22. pleads, that God would spare him, according to the greatness of his mercy, even in those duties in which he had expressed the most becoming zeal for the divine honour. "If" (says Job, chap. ix. 20, 21.) "I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: If I say I am perfect, it also shall prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life." And a little after, ver. 30, 31. "If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me." The Psalmist's prayer was, Psal. cxliii. 2. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for, in thy sight, no flesh living shall be justified." And his resolution, Psal. lxxi. 16. "I will make mention of thy righteousness, O God; even of thine only." Daniel, chap. ix. 18. declares; "We present not our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies."—But we need not insist on particular instances. The apostle Paul has expressly declared, that "by the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified in God's sight ^h." A passage sufficient to decide the controversy, notwithstanding the false interpretations which some have attempted to put upon it. We may shortly mention some of them, to show their weakness and absurdity. Thus, it has been argued, with a great shew of learning, that the apostle only intended to exclude the works of the ceremonial law from justification,

^h Rom. iii. 20.

tion, the fondness of judaizing Christians for these being the sole occasion of his writing. But, should it be granted that that was the occasion of the epistle; yet, how will it follow, that upon that occasion the apostle did not write against trusting in all works of righteousness whatever? It is not denied, that the works of the ceremonial law are included; and therefore, arguments to prove them to be included, are to no purpose, unless they prove that no other works are intended. And, that this can never be proven, is abundantly evident from the whole strain of the apostle's reasoning. He proves his assertion by arguments, equally applicable to the moral as the ceremonial law, and which, therefore, if good in the one case, are as much so in the other. Thus, he argues, that since, "by the law, is the knowledge of sin ⁱ;" since "the law worketh wrath ^j;" since we must be justified in a way by which "boasting is excluded ^k;" since, "as many as are under the works of the law, are under the curse," the curse extending to every the least act of disobedience ^l; that, therefore, it is vain to look for justification by the works of the law. Either, therefore, we must say, that the apostle's reasonings are inconclusive; or it will follow, that, whether the apostle directly intended them or not, yet that the works of the moral, as well as of the ceremonial law, must be excluded from justification. But we need not insist on this, since there are so many evidences that the works of the moral law were directly intended. The apostle is treating of that law, whose "doers shall be justified ^m;"—"by which every mouth is stopt, and all the world becomes guilty
" before

ⁱ Rom. iii. 20. ^j Rom. iv. 15. ^k Rom. iii. 26. 28.;
Eph. ii. 8, 9. ^l Gal. iii. 10. ^m Rom. ii. 13.

“ before God ⁿ :” that law, “ which, if a man do
 “ the works of it, he shall live in them ^o ;” that law
 “ which is established by faith ^p :” descriptions which,
 with no tolerable propriety, can be applied to any law
 but the moral. And how strong and full are these
 expressions ! “ To him that worketh not, but be-
 “ lieveth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith
 “ is counted for righteousness ^q .” How can the god-
 lineſs, how can the works of a person, be the ground
 of his justification, who, before his justification, is
 represented as destitute of both ? Going about to e-
 ſtabliſh our own righteousness, of whatever kind, is
 aſcribed by the apoſtle, Rom. x. 3. to ignorance of
 the righteousness of God. And Tit. iii. 5. he de-
 clares, that “ not by works of righteousness which we
 “ have done, but according to his mercy, he ſaved
 “ us.” But, enough has been ſaid on this head.—
 Others again allege, that the apoſtle only excludes
 from justification the outward works of the law, or
 works performed without an inward principle of faith,
 or of the fear or the love of God, but which flow
 barely from a ſervile reſpect to the threatenings of the
 law, or a proud conceit of merit in the performance
 of them. But this pretence is equally vain ; for the
 works excluded are works which the law requires :
 but God never could give a law requiring only out-
 ward ſervile performances. Beſides, the works of A-
 braham are expreſsly excluded from his justification,
 which ſurely were not works of the kind above repre-
 ſented.

Vain, then, and preſumptuous are thoſe hopes, which
 are built upon no better foundation than our own
 righteousness.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 19.

^o Rom. x. 5. ; Gal. iii. 12.

^p Rom. iii. 31.

^q Rom. iv. 5.

righteousness. Our obedience at best has but a finite value, and therefore can never atone for an infinite guilt; and yielding obedience in one period of our lives, can never be construed as fulfilling that law which requires obedience at all times. A righteousness we need, the worthiness of which might be answerable to the unworthiness of our disobedience: and such a righteousness none could work out, but a person of infinite dignity; One who was as great and worthy, as we were guilty and mean. The most pure and spotless spirit in Heaven, nay, all the angels who encircle the throne, could not furnish out such a righteousness for one soul. But, blessed be God, "He, who was higher than the heavens, He, who was made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they^a;" "He, by whom all things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers^b:" He, I say, hath become the Lord our righteousness, and graciously supplied us with that which nowhere else could have been found. In our room and stead, he fulfilled all righteousness; and ever did the things which pleased God. "He hath finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness^c." A righteousness perfect and complete, and fully answering the utmost demands of law and justice: A righteousness of infinite value, being wrought out by one of infinite dignity: A righteousness which reflects a higher honour on the law of God, than all the other obedience that ever was, or ever shall be, paid to it through all eternity: A right-

U

teousness,

Heb. i. 4.

^b Col. i. 16.^c Dan. ix. 24.

teousness, in consequence of which the sinner is absolved from guilt, and freed from condemnation; accepted as righteous in God's sight, and entitled to all the blessings of the well ordered covenant: A righteousness, which the Christian can plead against the accusations and challenges of all his enemies; which can quiet the terrors of conscience, and lay the surest foundation for inward peace. "For he was made sin
 "for us who knew no sin, that we might be made
 "the righteousness of God in him ^d." "He is the
 "end of the law for righteousness to every one that
 "believeth ^e." "As by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even
 "so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came
 "upon all men unto justification of life. For as by
 "one man's disobedience many were made sinners,
 "so by the obedience of one shall many be made
 "righteous ^f." Well then we may desire to be
 "found in him, not having our own righteousness
 "which is of the law, but that which is through
 "the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of
 "God through faith ^g." This is the righteousness, how much soever impious wits may dare to ridicule it, through which all the seed of Israel are justified, and in which they glory. To deny this, and to suppose that God, when about to raise the poor guilty sinner from his misery, and lift him up to the enjoyment of himself, sets these favours to sale for the price of our virtue and obedience; such a scheme is highly derogatory to the honour of God and the Redeemer, and leads us to build our hopes of salvation on another foundation than God hath laid. It in effect

^d 2 Cor. v. 21.^f Rom. v. 18, 19.^e Rom. x. 4.^g Phil. iii. 9.

fect makes man his own saviour, by putting his virtue in the room of Christ. Happy are they who submit to the righteousness of Christ, counting their own righteousness as loss and dung ! Happy are they, who by the arm of faith receive abundance of grace and of this gift of righteousness, or (as it is elsewhere expressed) to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works ! And how vain and foolish, as well as impious, is it, to cavil at that, in which we can never enough exult, and for which we can never be sufficiently thankful ? The best excuse for those who do so, is, that they speak evil of the things they know not. But, it is to be feared, there are some amongst them who are willingly ignorant, and who perversely labour to exhibit an important doctrine in a ludicrous form. When we talk of an imputed righteousness, they ask with a sneer, How what we never performed can be accounted ours ? and how God can see things in a wrong light, and mistake us for Christ, in so far as to count him the sinner, and us the righteous persons ? But all this ridicule is founded on misrepresentation. We do not assert, that the God, whose judgement is always according to truth, judges the righteousness of Christ to be a righteousness wrought out by us in our own persons, or that he takes it from Christ, and transfers it to us. All we assert, is, that God places it to our account, deals well with us for the sake of it, and graciously accepts it for our pardon and justification. And what is there in this, of which reason needs to be ashamed ? When a debt I owe, is paid for me by another, may not the creditor reasonably enough place it to my account ? And will his doing so prove, that he has so far forgot the transaction, as to imagine that I myself paid the debt ? Or, is there any thing more

common, than for men to receive kindness for the sake of others, which they could never expect for their own? If there is one who has done us eminent services, we count it reasonable to reward his merit, not only in his own person, but by bestowing favours upon those with whom he is nearly connected, and for whose interest he discovers a concern. Since then the Christian, by believing on Jesus, becomes mystically one with him; is it any thing strange that his merits should be imputed to him? And here we may take occasion to clear up an expression which has often been the cause of angry debate; I mean, in what sense we are justified by faith, or faith is the condition of our justification. In one sense, the sufferings and obedience of Christ is the only condition; that, alone, founding our claim to pardon and acceptance. In another sense, love, meekness, and all the other graces of the Spirit, as well as faith, may be termed conditions; seeing these graces and justification are always connected, so that, where the one is, the other is also. But there is a sense in which faith only, as distinguished from all other graces, justifies; even as it unites to the Mediator, in and by whom we are justified. And surely there is nothing more reasonable, than that union with Christ should found a right to all his benefits; even as the relation of the wife to the husband, with which that union is sometimes compared, is the ground of her joint interest in his estate. And how fit and suitable is it, that those, and those alone, who are one with Christ by their own act, should, in a law sense, be looked upon as one with him, and so receive the advantage of his merits and satisfaction? God delights in order, and not in confusion; and therefore looks upon Christ's merits

merits as theirs, and adjudges his benefits to those, and those alone, whose hearts and souls are actively united to him ⁿ. But it is now time to draw to a close.

It greatly concerns us all, seriously and diligently to inquire, if, in this sense, we are righteous. Let us then ask our consciences, If they have ever been filled with deep and lively convictions of the necessity of this righteousness, and the absolute insufficiency of any righteousness of our own, for our justification before God? Have we by faith received the righteousness of Jesus, and been brought to a humble and steadfast reliance upon it? Have the views we have had of our obligations to Christ, kindled in our bosoms real and supreme affections to him? Does our faith purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world? Then we may safely believe, that Jesus is made unto us righteousness; nay, we ought to take the comfort of it, giving to God the glory. Let us improve this righteousness as the strongest motive to a holy life; thus judging, "That if one died for all, "then were all dead: and that he died for all, that "they which live, should not henceforth live unto "themselves, but unto him which died for them, and "rose again ^o." Let us apply to, and plead this righteousness, under a sense of our sins and miscarriages, our wants and weaknesses, our troubles and afflictions,

U 3

and

ⁿ Those who would desire a particular solution of other objections against the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and a fuller illustration of the proofs of this doctrine, may consult Dr Owen on justification, Richard Rawlins's sermons, President Edwards on justification, and Maclaurin on prejudices against the gospel. On this branch of my subject, I have been greatly indebted to the two last.

and the near prospect of death and eternity.—And let those who are yet in their sins, be exhorted not to add this to their former provocations, that when God has provided for them so glorious a righteousness, and made a full and free offer of it in the everlasting gospel, that yet they despise the counsel of God against themselves, and count themselves unworthy of eternal life.

PART II.

We were naturally led from these words to consider, in what sense the people of God are all righteous. And we observed, in the first place, that they had a full and complete righteousness, answering the utmost demands of the law, to found their title to the divine favour. The necessity of such a righteousness we endeavoured to prove, and that it is nowhere else to be found, save in the obedience and sufferings of Jesus imputed to every believing soul.

But, ere I go on to the next general head, I cannot but take notice of a ridiculous opinion highly derogatory to this doctrine, which the present age, fruitful in absurdities, has greedily imbibed. “We do not deny (say some) that a title to life is given believers, as a reward of the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ: we only maintain, that an interest in that satisfaction and righteousness is bestowed as a reward of our sincere (though imperfect) obedience.”

But, let me ask those who maintain this doctrine, If our obedience is of such a value, that God, as a testimony of his regard to it, rewards it with an interest

terest in Jesus Christ ; Would it not then have been of sufficient worth to purchase salvation directly, without the intervention of Christ's righteousness ? The gift of Christ, is greater in itself than the gift of heaven. If, then, the gift of Christ, a gift greater than that of salvation, is bestowed on account of our obedience ; Why might not salvation itself have been given as its reward ? And why was Jesus sent to provide us with a righteousness, if our own obedience might have sufficed ? And may we not, upon this hypothesis, when it is inquired, " Who made thee to differ from another ? " safely enough answer, Our own righteousness made us thus to differ ; the worthiness of that, being the reason why we, not others, were interested in Jesus, and so made partakers of eternal life ?

II. It is now time to proceed to the second particular, to show that those are righteous, in the language of scripture, who, by the influences of the Holy Spirit, have an inherent righteousness wrought in them. This is a principal blessing promised to the New-Testament church ; " It shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem p." " And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness ; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those : The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein q." " Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah, and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity,

U 4

" vity,

p Isa. iv. 3.

q Isa. xxxv. 8.

“vity, The Lord blefs thee, O habitation of Juftice,
 “and mountain of Holinefs.” “Then will I
 “fprinkle clean water upon you, and ye fhall be
 “clean: from all your filthinefs, and from all your
 “idols will I cleanse you. A new heart alfo will I
 “give you, and a new fpirit will I put within you,
 “and I will take away the ftony heart out of your
 “flefth, and I will give you an heart of flefh. And I
 “will put my fpirit within you, and caufe you to walk
 “in my ftatutes; and ye fhall keep my judgments,
 “and do them f.”

Indeed, an inherent righteousnefs is as neceffary to our happinefs, though in a different refpect, as an intereft in the obedience and fufferings of Chrift. A right to heaven will never bring any there, who are not in fome meafure made meet for the inheritance of the faints in light; and none are thus meet, but thofe who are renewed in the fpirit of their minds. There is fomething of a relifh, without which, joys of any kind are taftelefs and infipid. The moft beautiful pictures will afford little pleafure to one who has no tafte for painting; nor the fineft mufic, to one who has no ear. Scripture hath affured us, that “with-
 “out holinefs, no man fhall fee the Lord; and that
 “there fhall in nowife enter into the heavenly Jerufa-
 “lem any thing that defileth, neither whatfoever
 “worketh abomination, but they which are written
 “in the Lamb’s book of life.” And indeed the rea-
 son of the thing is abundantly plain: A foul immerfed in fenfual enjoyments would not be happy in heaven, were it admitted there; but, amidft the delights of thofe bleffed manfions, would find nothing to gratify its unruly defires. How could he fpend an eternity
 in

’ Jer. xxxi. 23.

’ Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27.

in serving and praising God, who counts it a weariness to spend a few hours in those exercises, and the language of whose heart is, "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?" Or what satisfaction could he have in "ascribing blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, to Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever," whose heart never felt the least sentiment of gratitude to redeeming love; nay, whose delight it was, to tarnish and obscure the glory of the exalted Redeemer? Would he be a fit inhabitant of that country, where perfect love and harmony shall for ever dwell, whose heart burns with envy, malice, and revenge, and who is never easy and pleased, till all about him are miserable? Or, would it give him joy, to be brought to mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; who, so far from esteeming the saints the excellent ones of the earth, counts them the filth of the world, and the offscourings of all things, and takes a pleasure to represent them to others in such a light, as may render them universally odious or contemptible? A society composed of members, whose principles and tempers were so highly opposite, would soon fall into confusion and disorder: for, as the apostle strongly reasons, "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" It is necessary, then, we should be all glorious within; or, in other words,

words, adorned with all the different graces of the Spirit, if we would "enter into the King's palace."

But, how far is this from being the condition of any by nature? Man was indeed, at first, framed a glorious and excellent creature, capable of knowing, serving, and enjoying God: But the bright attire of innocence and integrity, he soon cast off, exchanged the image of God for that of the devil, and became regardless of his truest interests, and the willing slave of his worst enemies. This depraved and polluted nature, he communicates to all his posterity; and in these wretched circumstances do they all ly, till effectual grace bring them out of them. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doth good, no, not one." "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" When we hear of the blackest villanies, or the vilest monsters of impiety, we may view in them what we ourselves, nay, what the best of men, naturally are. If all run not into the same excess of riot, and are not guilty of the same particular actual sins, yet the bitter source of original corruption is in all the same; and the only reason why it does not discover itself equally in all, is the difference of persons constitutions and natural tempers, the different circumstances of life in which they are placed, the inconsistency between different vices, and the restraining or sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God. There is an ocean of corruption within

* Rom. iii. 10, 11, 12.

° Jer. xvii. 9.

in us, which, in unregenerate men, carries all before it. They are slaves to diverse lusts and pleasures, and led captive by Satan at his will. Their own unruly appetites say to them, Go, and they go; Come, and they come; Do this, and they do it. "Their understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts *." Their will is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. Their affections earthly, sensual, devilish. Their consciences often seared as with a red hot iron, and insensible of their dangerous condition, or at best void of a true sense of the spirituality and extent of the divine law, and their obligation in every instance to obey it.

They that are thus in the flesh, cannot please God. They have no capacity or meetness for either serving or enjoying him. They have no relish for communion with God, nor can they perform any one action acceptable in his sight: for, when the thing they do, is materially good, the virtuous principle whence it should flow, is still awanting. They may indeed declaim handsomely on the natural beauty of virtue, and the hatefulness of vice, and even find a delight in reflecting on these things. But not to observe, that to talk is one thing, and to act another, and that it is easier to approve a virtuous character, than to imitate it; I would at present only inquire, what is that virtue of which worldly men so often vainly boast? Is it not a creature of their own, independent on God either for direction or assistance? a beautiful chimera, that may delight the fancy, but can never mend the heart? Is it not defective in its principle and motives? And when they have strained things to the utmost, and
dressed

* Eph. iv. 18.

dressed them up in the most favourable light ; yet, is it not plain, that still a regard to the divine authority and approbation, are not viewed by them as the foundations of morality, but rather a desire of self-approbation ; *i. e.* in other words, a refined pride, which pleases itself in admiring their own notions, conceiving themselves of superior excellency to others, and imagining that complete happiness may be found, without looking abroad, or being obliged to any for it but ourselves ?—Is not their virtue likewise defective in its extent ? Perhaps, they can talk fluently in praise of universal benevolence, and a charitable candid disposition ; yet, when they come to explain their sentiments by their conduct, this charity is confined to those who favour their opinions, or who possibly are indifferent about religion altogether ; while the least appearance of serious devotion, and fervent zeal for God, is enough to forfeit it. Indeed, their charity is as mysterious as the faith of the most bigotted Catholic. It is equally full of contradictions, and seems resolved to found itself, not upon evidence, but upon the want of it. Where every thing has the worst appearance, there they will believe well : but, where the outward conduct is blameless, they candidly suspect that nothing but hypocrisy lies at the bottom.—But, perhaps, there are others not chargeable in this respect. They injure no man in his character and reputation ; and, with Samuel, can challenge their adversaries, “ Whose ox have I taken ? or
“ whose ass have I taken ? or whom have I defraud-
“ ed ? whom have I oppressed ? or of whose hands
“ have I received any bribe, to blind mine eyes there-
“ with ? They despise the gain of oppression ; they
“ shake their hands from holding of bribes ; they stop
“ their

“ their ears from hearing slander ; and shut their eyes
“ from seeing evil. ” And happy were it for society,
did many come even this length ! But, how far short
is this negative holiness of that inherent righteousness
which the gospel requires ? True religion will dis-
pose us, not only to do no man harm, but to contri-
bute, as much as possible, to promote the best inte-
rests of mankind. It will lead us to mind, not our
own things only, but the things of others also ; and
to have a tender regard, not only to their temporal
welfare, but also to their eternal happiness. But, alas !
how many are there, who, while they talk of disin-
terestedness, can sacrifice the honour or interest of
their friend or country, to gratify a lazy, indolent, or
cowardly disposition ? Such should remember, that
not only the wicked, but the unprofitable servant, (he
who did not squander away his talent, but only hid it
in a napkin), was cast into outer darkness, where there
is weeping and gnashing of teeth.—But, there are
some who advance still higher. They lay out their
time and talents for the benefit of others, and are at
once ornaments and blessings to their country, and all
connected with them. Their character is like that of
Job, chap. xxix. 11—18. “ When the ear hears them,
“ then it blesses them ; and when the eye sees them,
“ it gives witness to them : because they delivered the
“ poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that
“ had none to help him. The blessing of them that
“ were ready to perish comes upon them, and they
“ cause the widow’s heart to sing for joy. They put
“ on righteousness, and it clothes them : their judg-
“ ment is as a robe and a diadem. They are eyes to
“ the blind, and feet are they to the lame : They are
“ fathers to the poor ; and the cause which they
“ knew

“knew not, they search out: And they break the jaws of the wicked, and pluck the spoil out of his teeth.” And, in so far, their character is truly amiable and praiseworthy. But, while they render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s; do they also render to God the things that are God’s? While they admire the beauty, the harmony, and proportion of created objects; what relish do they discover for contemplating that Being, compared with whom, all created beauty shrinks, as it were, into nothing, and utterly disappears? While they blame the man who forgets his obligations to his friend or country, they themselves overlook obligations infinitely greater, which they are under to that God, whose is their life and breath, and to whom alone they owe all their happiness. Infinite excellence, they judge too mean an object to employ their thoughts; and the favours conferred upon them by the goodness of God, too insignificant to raise in them one sentiment of gratitude. And can those be the objects of divine favour, and God approve them as dutiful sons, who forget him their heavenly father, merely because they are not forgetful of each other’s interests? As well might a Sovereign look with approbation on a company of traitors who had combined to dethrone him, when he viewed their faithfulness to each other in carrying on that design.—But some of our moralists go still farther. They screw themselves up to a kind of mechanical devotion, picture to themselves a god made up of nothing but mercy, and then fall down and worship him. But, alas! what do they do but worship an idol, the creature of their own fancy? We can never worship God aright, without viewing him as he really is, *i. e.* as not only infinitely merciful, but infinitely just.

just. And, in that view, the guilty sinner can never love him, till he be led to Jesus, who has at once glorified the mercy and justice of God, and has given the brightest display of the former, without eclipsing the lustre of the latter, sweetly uniting both in the sinner's interest. But we need not enlarge on this head. The best of natural men, did they sift themselves to the bottom, might find the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life, the springs of their highest attainments; and that, to one or other of these idols, their devotions were constantly paid. And surely, attainments which flow from no better a source, will never render us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, or constitute us inherently righteous, in the gospel sense.

But there are other attainments of a different kind, equally unprofitable to the persons themselves as those already mentioned, and even still less beneficial to society, from which notwithstanding men are apt to take up a favourable opinion of themselves, though strangers to rectitude of heart: I refer to certain religious impressions made upon their minds, and a certain train of experiences, carrying in them a great resemblance to a work of conversion, and yet falling short of it. Take heed therefore that a foundation be laid, able to support your religious dispositions, whatever storms may beat against them. And as a mistake here, may be attended with the most fatal effects, leading you to neglect opportunities of bettering your condition, and thus bringing you to the grave with a lie in your right hands; beware of taking up with slight evidences, and rashly passing judgment that things are right with you. —Perhaps you have felt inward legal terrors, and qualms of religious melancholy, nay, even deep convictions

victions of sin, joined with desires of forgiveness. But, is the feeling a disease, the same with its cure? Or, is the fear of hell one moment, any reason for confidently expecting heaven the next? Such impressions may be owing to nothing but self-love, and the workings of a natural conscience: and, should they be indeed the effect of immediate Divine influence, as no doubt in many instances they are; yet still there is a danger, lest persons in these circumstances quench the Spirit, nay, rebel and vex him, whereby he may be turned to be their enemy, and fight against them.—Nor is every seemingly pious desire, every sudden start of devout affection, to be esteemed sufficient. From a natural sweetness of temper, the passions of some are easily wrought upon, by lively representations, whether of a pleasant or terrible nature; the eloquence of the preacher, and the affectionate way in which he paints objects, moving their minds, just as an interesting story is apt to do. Hence, the stony ground hearers received the word with joy; but, having no root in themselves, soon fell back. Their joy had not for its root an inward principle of grace, but only a series of beautiful words and images, striking their imagination with pleasure and delight, and perhaps for a time diverting their thoughts so much to a new channel, that their outward conduct has been greatly reformed, and their corruptions laid under a powerful arrest. But soon they fall back; the relish which novelty produced, by degrees subsides; the weight that moves them is taken off, and they return to their former course. Nay, it is possible that they may not experience even such a change as this. Ezekiel was to many as the song of one that had a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument, who yet remained disobedient to his message.

message. The sentiments which a preacher delivers, may be admired and applauded; while yet they may have as little influence to mend the heart or reform the life, as reading a philosophical dissertation on the beauties of virtue, or a lively satire against vice.— There are again others, who, in consequence of a good education, the company they converse with, or some remarkable incidents in their lives, may contract a kind of liking to religion, and be greatly affected with a sense of its beauty. Thus Jehoshaphat did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him: But the death of his teacher was soon followed with the death of his piety; and he so far degenerated, as to stone the son of Jehoiada, for daring to reprove the wicked courses in which he was engaged. What lively views of divine things had Balaam! How strong a sense of the safe and happy state of God's peculiar people! How deep were his religious impressions! And what firm resolutions did he form of holding fast his integrity, in spite of all that Balak could do to corrupt him! Yet from the whole of his history it is plain, that all this while he was no saint.—Let me not be mistaken: I am far from saying, that deep convictions of sin, or lively impressions of divine things, occasioned perhaps by a moving sermon, a good education, the company we converse with, or some remarkable incident of life, do not often issue in a saving change. These are hopeful appearances, and loudly call for joy and praise. But still there is a danger, lest, by laying too great stress upon them, those that are almost persuaded to become Christians, and seem not far from the kingdom of God, should yet lose the things they have wrought, and fail of the expected reward. There is a danger,

lest, while they say and think they are rich, and increased in goods, and stand in need of nothing, they be not indeed wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; fondly imagining themselves the friends of God, but in reality at enmity with him, in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity. The goodness of such has often proved as the early cloud, and morning dew, which soon pass away: Their goodly appearances have withered and decayed, and their after-conduct evidenced that an effectual change never passed upon them. After having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again intangled therein, and overcome; and the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

Inherent righteousness is something of a more glorious and durable nature than the highest of those attainments. It is described in scripture, as a being renewed in the spirit of our minds; a putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness; a new creature; a being transformed by the renewing of our minds; the having a clean heart created, and a right spirit renewed within us; nay, even as having Christ formed in us, and being made partakers of the Divine nature. It is the health and prosperity of the soul, as it cures the spiritual distempers which the fall brought upon us, and restores the due exercise of the powers and faculties which God has given us. It capacitates us for knowing, serving, and enjoying God. All old things are done away, and all things become new. The understanding, sometime darkness, is now light in the Lord. The glorious perfections of the Divine nature, the vanity of this world, the pleasures of communion and fellowship with

God,

God, the infinite evil of sin, the beauties of holiness, the misery of a natural state, and the all-sufficiency of the Redeemer, are now apprehended in another light than before. The things, which formerly were viewed only in a speculative light, now appear as realities of the last importance. The eyes of their understanding are opened, to perceive what is the hope of God's calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the height, and breadth, and length, and depth of the love of God, which passes knowledge. Their judgment is now practically convinced, that the enjoyment of God, and conformity to his blessed image, are absolutely necessary to their happiness. In consequence of this, their wills, formerly bent to evil, and averse to good, become in some measure conformed to the divine will; their affections, which formerly grovelled upon this earth, are set upon the things which are above, where Jesus sitteth at the right hand of God; and their passions are reduced under a right government. They are sanctified throughout, in soul, body, and spirit. They present themselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to the Lord, which is their reasonable service. They esteem God's commandments above gold, yea, much fine gold. They count all his precepts concerning all things to be right, and hate every false way.

Let me then ask you the question, or rather entreat you to ask it at yourselves, which Jehu asked Jehonadab ere he would intrust him with his counsels, Is thy heart right? Have you that good and perfect heart which David prayed for to Solomon his son? A heart full of love to God, breathing after communion and fellowship with him, choosing the things which please him, and devoted to his service? A heart which,

conscious of your own unworthiness, leads you to look for acceptance only through the Well-beloved ; which approves of, and acquiesces in, the plan of redemption through a crucified Redeemer ; and rejoices, that though poor in yourselves, yet in him you are complete ? A heart full of love to Jesus, esteeming him as the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely, and solacing itself in him as your beloved and your friend ? A heart inflamed with zeal for the divine glory, and which prefers Zion, and the interests of Zion's king, to its chiefest earthly joy ? A heart burning with love to mankind, especially those that are of the household of faith ? A heart which mourns and laments over the remainders of corruption, presses after perfection in holiness, longs for that state where we shall sin no more ; and, in a word, whose highest ambition it is, here to glorify God, and hereafter to be with him where he is, to behold his glory ? A heart, where love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and all the other graces of the Spirit, do now reside ? Happy they who feel the beginnings of such a disposition ! The Spirit has been at work with them, and produced in them a begun meetness for heaven. And God is the rock, and his work perfect. He that hath begun a good work in them, will carry it on to the day of the Lord, when they shall appear without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. The day of their complete redemption draweth near. The Spirit is preparing them for heaven ; and Jesus, who has gone to heaven to prepare for them a place there, will ere long return, and receive them to himself, that where he is, there they may be also,

PART

PART III.

In addressing you on two former occasions from these words, we viewed the people of God as possessed of an imputed righteousness to found their right and title to heaven, and as inherently righteous, and thereby made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. We go on,

III. To view them as evidencing themselves righteous in the sense formerly explained, by abounding in works of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. But here two cautions are necessary, to prevent mistakes: 1. Virtuous actions do not constitute a person inherently righteous, but declare him so; as good fruit is rather a declaration of the goodness of the tree, than the thing which constitutes that goodness. And therefore, 2. Virtuous actions cannot be said to be necessary to salvation, in the same sense in which inherent holiness is so: for without holiness, no man can see the Lord. But it is possible, that, where holiness is implanted, life may be so quickly taken away, that there shall be no room for its discovering itself by the outward behaviour. The case of such of the elect as die in their infancy, appears one proof of this, and that of such of them as are converted on a deathbed, another. The last of these has indeed been represented by some, as a case never existing; to which they have probably been led by a notion, that, as habits of any kind are only to be acquired by a repeated course of actions, it is absurd to suppose virtuous dispositions instantaneously implanted in the soul. But such in so far do err, not considering the scriptures, neither the

power of God. The power of God, in this case, cannot be questioned; since he who created our first parents perfectly holy, and adorned the human nature of Christ, so soon as it existed, with all the lineaments of the divine image, can easily in a moment restore that image where, by sin, it has been lost. But the scripture seems to intimate, that this is more than a mere possibility; and that not a few individuals only, but even great numbers, may be thus suddenly wrought upon: “^{*} Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day, or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.” And in the 18th Psalm it is promised, that “a people whom the Messias had not known should serve him, and as soon as they heard of him should obey him.” And that this was literally accomplished in the first ages of Christianity, the three thousand converted by Peter’s sermon are a sufficient proof; many of whom, as we may learn from Peter’s sermon, had been accessory to crucifying the Lord of Glory: not to observe in how many instances the preaching of the word since that time, and the martyrdom of Christians, have produced a real though sudden change on those whose prejudices against the gospel seemed to have been most riveted. But it will be said, such had their lives lengthened out, to give evidence that their conversion was genuine. It might be replied, that probably this was not always the case, since we read of some, whose conversion was instantly followed by suffering martyrdom for Christ. Let me further

^{*} Isa. lxvi. 7, 8.

further inquire, if we are not bound in charity to believe that virtuous dispositions were implanted in those men, when they discovered so deep a regard to religion, as to shed their blood for the sake of it? And if these dispositions would not have made them meet for heaven, though their lives had been instantly cut off in a natural way, and no opportunity given thus remarkably to signalize their zeal for Christ? Has not God declared, that where there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not? If it be further argued, that Christians at their first conversion are in an infant state, and that greater ripeness is necessary ere they be transplanted to glory; I shall answer in the words of the prophet Isaiah, “^y There shall be no more thence an “ infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled “ his days; for the child shall die an hundred years “ old.” It is easy for God, even in a moment, to take from a soul its filthy garments, and clothe it with spotless purity and perfection.

Let none imagine, from what has been said, that they may safely put off thoughts of religion to a death-bed. How many are there, who are called off the stage of life, without any warning of their approaching dissolution! “ The day of the Lord cometh upon them “ as a thief in the night. For when they say, peace “ and safety, sudden destruction cometh, as travail upon a woman with child; and they cannot escape. “ God sets them in slippery places, and casts them “ down into destruction. How are they brought into “ desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors^z.” Thousands there are now lifting up their eyes in torments, who may ascribe their

X 4

eternal

^y Chap. lxxv. 20.^z Psal. lxxiii. 18, 19.

eternal ruin to their foolish expectation of a hereafter they never enjoyed ! But should life be prolonged ; yet, is it to be thought that our consciences will become more tender, or our vicious inclinations less strong, by our continuing so much longer in our rebellion and apostasy ? Or, is rejection of the merciful calls and invitations of the gospel a probable method of recommending us to the divine favour ? How awful is the threatening, “^a Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought my counsel, and would none of my reproof : I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh ; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me !” But though the man must have little sense of the value of eternal happiness, who can venture his interest in it on a thing so precarious as the continuance of life ; and though perhaps there is not one instance among ten thousand, where deathbed convictions issue in a saving change ; yet, to limit the grace of God so far, as utterly to deny the possibility of it, appears to me highly dangerous. But to return.

Taking these cautions along with us, the necessity of works of righteousness, though not as a ground of our justification, yet, as an evidence of it, can never be too strongly asserted. “ He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting^b.” “ In this the children of God are
“ manifest,

^a Prov. i. 24—28.^b Gal. vi. 8.

“ manifest, and the children of the devil : whoſe-
 “ doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God, neither he
 “ that loveth not his brother ^c.” “ To them only
 “ who order their converſation aright, will be
 “ ſhown the ſalvation of God ^d.” “ Jeſus being
 “ made perfect, is become the author of eternal ſal-
 “ vation unto all them that obey him ^e.” The
 end of his death was, to “ redeem us from all ini-
 “ quity, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people,
 “ zealous of good works ^f.” “ God will render to
 “ every man according to his deeds : to them who,
 “ by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for
 “ glory, honour and immortality ; eternal life : but
 “ unto them that are contentious, and do not obey
 “ the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs ; indignation
 “ and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh upon every ſoul
 “ of man that doth evil, of the Jew firſt, and alſo
 “ of the Gentile ^g.”—The doctrine then of juſtifica-
 tion by an imputed righteouſneſs, is by no means a
 pillow for ſloth and ſecurity. The complete title the
 believer has to the forgivenneſs of ſins, does not in the
 leaſt diſſolve his obligations to the ſtricteſt obedience.
 Every motive, whether from intereſt or gratitude,
 whether from the beauty of religion or the pleaſures
 of a virtuous life, ſtill remains in full force. Hence
 multitudes who were firmly perſuaded that their right
 to pardon and eternal life was founded only on the me-
 rits of Jeſus, have at the ſame time been ſenſible, that
 they would never in fact be delivered from the wrath
 to come, or attain the recompence of reward, if they
 wickedly departed from their God : and hence they
 have viewed their own good works as comfortable
 evidences

^c 1 John iii. 10.^d Pſal. l. 23.^e Heb. v. 9.^f Tit. ii. 14.^g Rom. ii. 6—9.

evidences of forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God, and encouragements to a holy confidence in expecting them. " Destruction from God was a terror to Job ^h." " Paul kept under his body, and brought it in subjection ; lest, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away ⁱ." Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, because he had respect to the recompence of reward. And how often do we find Nehemiah, Job, David, and others, reflecting with pleasure on a well spent life, and comforting themselves from the remembrance of it, even in their most dark and melancholy hours ! To assert, then, the necessity of good works, throws not the least reflection on the fulness of Christ's purchase. Jesus has purchased for believers the blessings of this life, as well as of eternity. But does this purchase supersede the necessity of proper means for obtaining them ? Who will say, that because the long-suffering of God in preserving our natural life, is purchased for us by Christ, therefore we should not eat, or drink, or sleep, for life ? Equally absurd are the reasonings by which some would conclude, that in no sense whatsoever we are to work for life eternal ; which would infer, that we are not, by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, honour and immortality ; and that Paul's divinity is to be rejected. It is true, he who is once interested in the favour and friendship of God, can never fall from it ; but it is as true, that such a person can never apostatise from God's ways. And, were the last of these possible, the first would be so likewise. For, " if any man draw back, God's soul shall have no pleasure in him ^k." And whatever

your

^h Chap. xxxi. 23.ⁱ 1 Cor. ix. 27.^k Heb. x. 38.

you
" th
ed,
perfo
was
thou
migh
work
have
" ha
" th
" n
" lea
have
" fo
" th
in fu
uneas
" tin
" fer
" Cl
with
perfe
diate
all e
purch
flow
his h
mak
sent
the t
life,

your pretensions to religion are, “if you live after
 “the flesh, you shall die ¹.”—It is also to be remark-
 ed, that there is nothing inconsistent in a justified
 person’s suffering temporal afflictions for sin: for it
 was no end of Christ’s satisfaction to prevent this;
 though it was one end of it, that these afflictions
 might prove medicinal to them, and sooner or later
 work together for their good. Hence, such sufferings
 have been threatened against saints: “^m You only
 “have I known of all the families of the earth;
 “therefore will I punish you for your iniquities.”
 “ⁿ But I will correct thee in measure, and will not
 “leave thee altogether unpunished.” Nay, they
 have been actually inflicted: “Thou wast a God that
 “forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance on
 “their inventions ^o.” Indeed, sin’s being blotted out
 in such a sense, as that we should feel none of its
 uneasy effects, appears a blessing reserved for “the
 “times of refreshing which shall come from the pre-
 “sence of the Lord at the second appearance of
 “Christ Jesus ^p.” Nor is this any more inconsistent
 with believers being complete in Jesus, than their im-
 perfection in sanctification, and their not being imme-
 diately admitted to glory, is. God has indeed from
 all eternity purposed to pardon their sins; Jesus has
 purchased for them that pardon, and promised to be-
 stow it. But, may not a father intend to make a son
 his heir, purchase an estate for him, and promise to
 make over a right to it, while yet putting him in pre-
 sent possession is for wise reasons delayed? And if
 the sins of believers are not so pardoned while in this
 life, as to exclude fatherly chastisements for sin, much
 less

¹ Rom. viii. 13.^m Amos iii. 2.ⁿ Jer. xxx. 11.^o Psal. xc. x. 8.^p Acts iii. 19; See Isa. xxxiii. 24.—xl. 2.

less are they pardoned before they are committed. Otherwise we must say, either that forgiveness is not the dissolving an obligation to punishment, or that an obligation may be dissolved before it is contracted, or that an obligation to punishment may be contracted where there is no sin : suppositions which are all equally absurd.

We may further observe, that the reward of saints hereafter shall bear some proportion to their progress in holiness here below. “ As there is one glory of
“ the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another
“ glory of the stars, and one star differs from
“ another in glory ; so also is the resurrection of the
“ dead ^q. ” “ They that be wise shall shine as the
“ brightness of the firmament, and they that turn
“ many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and
“ ever ^r. ” “ He that soweth sparingly, shall reap
“ also sparingly ; and he that soweth plentifully, shall
“ reap also plentifully. ” Every saint dies safely ; but he bids fairest for dying in hope, who can appeal to God with Hezekiah, “ Remember now, O Lord, I
“ beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in
“ truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that
“ which is good in thy sight ^s. ” For true evangelical obedience is an infallible evidence of a gracious state, and a certain pledge and earnest of the heavenly inheritance : for, on the one hand, no man can perform it without vital union with Christ ; and, on the other hand, wherever that union is, such obedience will necessarily flow from it.

How strong and delightful, is the conclusion of the apostle Paul ! “ I have fought the good fight ; I
“ have finished my course ; I have kept the faith.

“ Henceforth

^q 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42.

^r Dan. xii. 3.

^s Isa. xxxviii. 3.

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge will give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” And can it be supposed, that one who has lost his first love, and on many occasions seems to have forgotten that he was purged from his old sins, can die with the same comfort? What ghastly apprehensions may fill his mind, when he reflects how much he has been conformed to the world; how often he has given place to the devil, or yielded to his own unruly lusts and appetites! How will it mar his confidence, that his progress in religion bears so small a proportion to that of other Christians of shorter standing, and favoured with fewer advantages than he! His trembling heart may thus reason:—“Are my spots like the spots of God’s children? Have I denied myself, taken up my cross daily, and followed Jesus? Have I gone forth to him, without the camp, bearing his reproach, and boldly stood up for his cause, when all men were forsaking him? Or, rather, have I not been ashamed of him and his words in this adulterous and perverse generation, and turned aside as a deceitful bow, when my honour, my ease, or my interest, came in competition with his glory? Was it not my care, as little as possible to put on the appearance of his children, that I might not share of their sufferings and reproach? Nay, have I not endeavoured to look like the world, and act like the world, that I might not fall under their censure? And, seeing I have not confessed Jesus before men, can I expect that he will confess me before his heavenly Father?”—Again, “How far have I come short in my duty to my neighbour,

bour, by transgressing, if not the laws of justice, at least the rules of charity and prudence? How many opportunities of usefulness to others, have I carelessly let slip? And, how can I expect the reward of faithful labourers, who have stood all the day idle? May I not rather look for that awful sentence, Cast the unprofitable servant into utter darkness; there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth? How often saw I Christ, in his members, hungry, and fed him not; thirsty, and gave him no drink; a stranger, and took him not in; naked, and clothed him not; sick, or in prison, and ministered not unto him? If, for every idle word men speak, they must give an account, how dreadful an account have I to make, for my numberless idle words and actions; nay, for words and actions, whereby I have heinously affronted a holy God, defiled my own conscience, strengthened the hands of the wicked, offended my weak brother, and occasioned many to stumble and fall! Is there a harmony between my words and actions? And have I, in no instance, pretended friendship, where I intended treachery, acting the most unfriendly part to those to whom I had professed the highest regard? Is there a harmony between my thoughts and words? And have I never, to serve a turn, artfully disguised my inward sentiments, and professed to believe, what I secretly meant to undermine? Or, is it my rejoicing, the testimony of my conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have had my conversation in this world? The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, or speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: And am I among that number, an Israelite indeed,

indeed, in whom there is no guile? Have I never taken up a bad report against my neighbour, aggravating his miscarriages, and putting the worst construction on his actions they could possibly bear? Have I never impiously assumed the prerogative of omniscience, prying into the hearts of men, and rashly pronouncing those cunning and designing hypocrites, whose outward conduct in every respect was more blameless than my own? Or, have I never represented my brother in a mean and contemptible light, as a weak, though well meaning man, because his conscience, perhaps, was a little more tender and scrupulous than my own? Why did I judge my brother, and why did I set at nought my brother, seeing we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ? And have I not cause to fear, that with what judgment I judged, I shall be judged; and with what measure I mete, it shall be measured to me again; and that I shall then find judgment without mercy, who thus to the characters of others have shown no mercy? Do I injure none, by violating any of those natural rights which God has bestowed upon all mankind in common, or by acting in contradiction to those particular connexions and relations which Providence has wisely established among mankind? Whatsoever I would that others should do to me, do I so unto them?"

Again, "Do I live soberly, as well as righteously and godly, in a present world? Is my mind under the governing influence of right principles? And do I put an estimate upon things according to their intrinsic worth and value? Am I duly cautious and deliberate in the whole of my conduct, keeping my heart with all diligence, and pondering the paths of my feet, that all my ways may be established? Do I watch

watch my unruly passions and appetites, endeavour to get the mastery over them, and to subject them to the rules of God's word? Do I guard against rash and immoderate anger, and put on the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price? Am I moderate in my desires and pursuits of the pleasures, the riches, and honours of this world; using them no further than tends to preserve me in life, and fit me for the better discharge of the duties of it; and endeavouring to refer them to God, by viewing them as emanations from his goodness, but yet as emanations from it greatly inferior to what the soul is capable of tasting in another way? Or do I, instead of mortifying my members which are on earth, still walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, indulging myself in sensual gratifications, and minding only earthly things?

“ Is my obedience from a right principle? Does it flow from superstition, hypocrisy, a servile, mercenary spirit, a bare regard to the authority and example of others, or perhaps to the approbation of my own mind? Or does it flow from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned? from a reverend and awful regard to the divine authority, a grateful sense of our obligations to creating, preserving, and redeeming love, and fervent desires after the enjoyment of God, and conformity to his blessed image? Whatever I do, do I it as unto the Lord, and not unto man; making it my single aim to please God, and approve myself to him in all things; and stedfastly resolving to adhere to duty in every instance, and to be swayed, by no inducement whatever, to run the risk of forfeiting the divine favour?

“ Has

“ Has my life been conducted by a right rule ; not by my own inclinations ; not by specious appearances of good designs ; not by inward impressions, which might perhaps prove the delusions of the father of lies ; not by the customs of a world lying in wickedness ; nay, nor even by the example of the wisest and best of men : but by His precepts, who spake as never man spoke, and His example, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth ? And am I at pains to know what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, even though it should happen to contradict my present sentiments, or oblige me to renounce practices, of which I am naturally most fond ? Or, rather, am I not afraid, in some instances, to search the scriptures, lest that should prove a sin which I have a mind to, or that a duty which I am averse to perform ?

“ Does my obedience fail in its extent ? Is there not some corruption, of which I am ready to say, Spare it, for it is a little one ? Is there not some beloved sin, in which I would willingly indulge myself a little longer ? or some duty, irksome to flesh and blood, from which I would gladly be excused ? Or, do I lay aside every weight, and the sin which does more easily beset me ; apply myself to every known duty, without stated and allowed reserves ; keep myself from my iniquity, and renounce what was dearer than a right hand or a right eye, that I may follow Jesus ? And when, in any instance, iniquity prevails against me, and the flesh, lusting against the Spirit, causes me to swerve from the paths of duty ; Is my heart tender ? Is my conscience quick in checking me for sin ? And do I feel that godly sorrow, which worketh a repentance not to be repented of, and which excites to

fresh applications to the blood of Jesus for pardon and cleansing? Do I cherish the influences of the Spirit, and the warnings of my own conscience, and cheerfully comply with their design?

“Is my obedience sincere? How do I stand affected to those parts of religion, to which God and my own conscience alone are witnesses? Am I satisfied with making clean the outside of the cup, and of the platter; solicitous to escape the censures of men, but regardless of the divine approbation? Can I indulge myself in drawing nigh to God with the mouth, and honouring him with the lips, while the heart is far from him? Or, is my obedience not only sincere, but willing and cheerful; performed with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my might? Am I fervent in spirit, serving the Lord? Does the zeal of God’s house eat me up? When I pray, do I, like Jacob, weep and make supplication, and earnestly wrestle for the needful blessing? When I attend the preached word, do I take heed how I hear? When I give alms, do I draw forth my soul to the hungry? And, in every instance, is it my meat and drink to do the will of my heavenly Father?”

It is almost impossible for the backsliding Christian, whose graces have been weak, and his corruptions strong, to avoid anxious perplexing thoughts, when conscience demands an answer to such questions. And if sinners, incapable of giving a satisfactory answer to any of them, should live in hope, we must be allowed to say, death shall utterly destroy their hopes; and they shall find, when too late, that “not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of our Father, which is in heaven.” If, then, you

would

Pa
wo
bou
pra
“ v
“ v
“ f
“ v
“ p
“ t
“ a
H
cept
wor
such
prea
hath
“ ha
“ fo
“ ce
“ fr
“ sh
“ fo
“ sh
“ ce
“ ho
“ G
“ sha
“ sha
“ do
“ lion
“ lea
“ the
“ lion
Psal

would shew yourselves to be the people of God, abound in those works of righteousness which are to his praise. "Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining as lights in the world. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

How happy a people would we be, did these precepts meet with a suitable regard! And how happy a world shall it be, when the gospel shall in fact have such an influence on the lives of those to whom it is preached! And such effects, the God, who cannot lie, hath assured us it shall produce. "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully: He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation ^a." "In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth ^b." "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing ^c." "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together: And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking

Y 2

"child

^a Psal. xxiv. 4, 5.^b Psal. lxxii. 7.^c Psal. xcii. 12, 13, 14.

“ child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the
 “ weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice-
 “ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my
 “ holy mountain : For the earth shall be full of the
 “ knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the
 “ sea ^d.” “ The heart also of the rash shall under-
 “ stand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammer-
 “ ers shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile person
 “ shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to
 “ be bountiful. But the liberal shall devise liberal
 “ things, and by liberal things shall he stand. The
 “ Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high, and
 “ the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful
 “ field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall
 “ dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain
 “ in the fruitful field. And the work of righteous-
 “ ness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness
 “ quietness and assurance for ever ^e.” “ Violence shall
 “ no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruc-
 “ tion within thy borders ; but thou shalt call thy
 “ walls salvation, and thy gates praise ^f.” “ The
 “ remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak
 “ lies ; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in
 “ their mouth : for they shall feed and ly down, and
 “ none shall make them afraid ^g.” “ In that day
 “ shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLI-
 “ NESS UNTO THE LORD ; and the pots in the
 “ Lord’s house shall be like bowls before the altar.
 “ Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be
 “ holiness unto the Lord of Hosts ; and all they that
 “ sacrifice, shall come and take of them, and see the
 “ therein :

^d Isa. xi. 6, 7, 8, 9.

^e Isa. xxxii. 4, 5, 8, 15, 16, 17.

^f Isa. lx. 18.

^g Zeph. iii. 13.

Pa
 “
 “
 I
 gin
 let
 lam
 ever
 you
 lang
 ful,
 con
 ly c
 flam
 ever
 extir
 has
 sure
 coun
 nal v
 ces,
 shini
 riage
 and
 quen
 the e
 suffic
 weak
 grace
 Yo
 at the
 Jesus

a Ze
 * T
 Glasgo

“ therein : And in that day there shall be no more
“ the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts ^h.”

If we would indeed wish for these things, let us begin with reforming ourselves ; and, for this purpose, let your loins be continually girt about, and your lamps burning. Watch against every occasion of sin, every appearance of evil, every thing that may darken your evidences for heaven, or cause your graces to languish and decay. Avoid things in themselves lawful, when you have cause to apprehend from them such consequences: and, still more, avoid what seems directly calculated to drown impressions of religion, to inflame our irregular appetites, to excite a contempt of every thing serious and sacred, as well as gradually to extinguish that spirit of industry for which this place has been deservedly esteemed. Purchase not the pleasure of a few hours with that which bids fair, if encouraged, for ruining at once your temporal and eternal welfare. Improve ordinances, improve providences, improve conversation with Christians, improve the shining examples of some, and the falls and miscarriages of others, as spurs to you in your Christian race, and means of drawing forth your graces into more frequent and lively exercise. And, above all, look up to the exalted head of influences, that his grace may be sufficient for you, and his strength made perfect in your weakness ; while you derive from his fulness grace for grace.

You in particular who have been lately sitting down at the table of the Lord *, as you have received Christ Jesus, so walk in him. Have you embraced him as a
Y 3 prophet ?

^h Zech. xiv. 20, 21.

* The sacrament of the Lord's Supper had been dispensed in Glasgow the preceding Sabbath.

prophet? Receive then the law from his mouth, and treasure up his words in your heart. Read his word with constancy and devotion, hear the messages of his servants with reverence and attention, and cherish with care the enlightening influences of his Spirit on your soul. Have you received him as your King? Make it your constant study to promote the interests of his kingdom, and to square your hearts and lives by the law he has given you. Have you received Christ as your strength? Continue then to trust in him as such, looking to him for ardour and help in the most hard and difficult services. Have you accepted him as your priest? By him then offer up the sacrifice of prayer and of praise continually, and rely on his merits alone for the acceptance of your persons and performances with God. Crush every motion of spiritual pride, and be convinced there is sin enough in the best thought ever you framed, to found a sentence of condemnation, should God examine it in strict justice. Such a humble sense of your own vileness, will draw after it tenderness of conscience, and fear to offend any more.

Let such as have fallen from their first love, reflect on the difference betwixt their present condition and the happy circumstances in which they were once placed. When they first received the Saviour, was it not with singleness of heart, with enlarged affections, with joy and delight, with gratitude and thankfulness, with earnest desires after conformity to him, and the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of fellowship with him; with fervent love to the children of God, and with sincere endeavours to bring forth fruit? What godly sorrow was there then in you; yea, what carefulness; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire;

yea,

yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge! Godly sorrow for your past offences; carefulness that you might not offend any more; indignation at yourselves, on account of the remainders of corruption; fears, lest by means of these you should fall from your steadfastness, and bring a reproach on the worthy name by which you are called; vehement desires after a state of sinless perfection; and zeal and eagerness, that others also may partake of the same grace. Such were your happy dispositions in the day of your espousals, and the day of the gladness of your heart. Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that you should not continue to obey the truth? Are ye willing it should be thought, that, after having tried a life of strict holiness, you found no such pleasures in it, as the word of God has represented, and therefore have bid it adieu? O generation! see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness to Israel, a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords, we will come no more to thee? What can ye gain by continuing in your rebellion? Thine own wickedness shall surely correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee. Know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing, and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works. And, for thy encouragement, know, if thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God. Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee; and thou shalt pay thy vows: thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee; and the light shall shine upon thy ways.

DISCOURSE X.

IN TWO PARTS.

THE IMPORTANT MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

1 TIMOTHY iii. 15, 16.

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF TRUTH, AND WITHOUT CONTROVERSY
GREAT IS THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS, GOD WAS MANIFEST IN
THE FLESH.

PART I.

BE not stumbled, that I consider the words, “ the
“ pillar and ground of truth,” as relating to the
great mystery of godliness. Indeed, by the common
division of the New Testament into verses, they relate
to the church, and have been explained as relating to
it by many ancient and modern divines. Little stress,
however, can be laid on these considerations ; for the
mistakes in the division of Scripture into verses, are
many ; and expositors often follow one another, blind-
ly, and without examination. It doth not seem na-
tural, that, in the same sentence, the church should
first be compared to a house, and then to a pillar.
Though one would think Timothy must have easily
understood what was meant by the “ house of God ;”
Paul immediately explains that expression by another,
“ the church of the living God.” It cannot, there-
fore, be supposed, that, in the next sentence, he would
give the Church an honorary title, more difficult to be
understood,

understood, without any explication. For though I need not help to perceive the design of the metaphor, "pillar and ground of truth," if it respects the great mystery of godliness; much reflection and study is necessary to find any tolerable sense, in which it will apply to the church. Nor is it enough to show that the Catholic church, or the clergy as her representatives, merit this title. They who adhere to the pure, uncorrupted doctrine of Christ; who publish, illustrate and defend it; and who transmit the truth, and the sacred oracles in which it is contained, to succeeding ages: they, we readily acknowledge, contribute to the firmness and stability of truth, though not indeed in itself, yet with respect to its general reception and continuance. But here, Paul speaks not of the church in general, or of faithful pastors and teachers as her representatives. He speaks of the small inconsiderable church at Ephesus, where as yet there were few church officers, and in which he was directing Timothy how to conduct himself till his return. And, was that church, with all her weaknesses and imperfections, the great preserver of purity of doctrine from corruption or ruin? Did she support the fabric of truth, and keep it from falling? and was the destruction of the Ephesian church as fatal to the gospel, as the removal of a foundation or pillar is to a building? If we refer the words, "pillar and ground of truth," to the great doctrine of our Lord's incarnation, the meaning of them is plain and easy, and could not be mistaken by the Jews, with whom it was usual to term important doctrines, pillars of faith, or grounds of truth. The particle *and* further confirms these reasonings, as it evidently connects the words, "pillar and ground of truth," in the

15th

15th verse, with the words, "without controversy
"great is the mystery of godliness," in the 16th.

It shall be my business, at this time, first to illustrate the doctrine of God manifest in the flesh, and then to direct you to the practical improvement of it. I reserve to another opportunity, Paul's account of that doctrine, as the pillar and ground of truth, and without controversy a great mystery of godliness.

I. I am to speak a little of God manifest in the flesh. It is an undoubted truth, that the perfections and glory of God the Father, were manifested in the incarnation, life and death of his only begotten Son. If these, in one respect, veiled the divine glory; they gave, in another, a new and fuller view of its brightness. Never was there so striking and sensible a manifestation of the greatness and majesty of God, as when, to do honour to God, his equal and fellow humbled himself, and made himself of no reputation. On earth, only weak, and wretched, and sinful man, does God homage. In hell, the most hateful part of the creation involuntarily proclaim his spotless purity, irresistible power, and tremendous justice. In heaven, indeed, the spirits of just men made perfect, and angels, who excel in wisdom and in strength, prostrate themselves before the throne of God's glory. Yet, exalted as these creatures are, they are nothing more than creatures; and, compared with God, are as the drop of the bucket, and the small dust of the balance. Hence, all they can do, to give to God the glory due to his name, is, like themselves, finite and imperfect. But, in Christ, the glory of God is revealed and adored in another manner. The glorious, the holy, the infinitely happy Son of the Highest, assumes

assumes human nature, that, by the most exalted obedience, and unparalleled sufferings, he might manifest the greatness of the Being, whom by sin we had offended, and magnify to the whole creation the sacred rights of His majesty, perfection and government. Thus we see somewhat of the venerable, adorable, amiable perfections of God, which no creature in the heights above, or in the depths beneath, by the joy or anguish of eternal ages, could have equally taught us.

In our text, however, God cannot mean the Father. To Him, the expressions, *made flesh*, and *come in the flesh*^a, evidently parallel to the expression here used, *manifest in the flesh*, cannot apply. Nor can it be said of the Father, as it is here said of God manifest in the flesh, that he was justified in the spirit, and received up into glory. Perhaps, I cannot better explain the words, *God was manifest in the flesh*, or more convincingly demonstrate their meaning; than by referring you to what the beloved disciple says of the same subject: “^b That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and shew unto you, that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us): that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.” He, *who was in the beginning*, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning, and the ending, the first and the last; He, who was with God, and

^a Jo. i. 14.; 1 Jo. iv. 2.; where the word flesh relates to the soul, as well as the body. See Matth. xxiv. 22.; Luke iii. 6.; Acts ii. 17.; Rom. iii. 20.; 1 Cor. i. 29.

^b 1 Jo. i. 1—3.

and was God ; *the word of life*, who with a word communicated life to a vast variety of creatures ; *the life*, who has life in its source, fullness and perfection, having life in himself, even as the Father hath life in Himself ; *the eternal life*, who, being indebted to none, for life, by none can be deprived, of it ; though the invisible God, was so manifest in the flesh, as to become the object of man's bodily senses, to be heard, seen, looked upon, and handled ; so that, in a literal sense, it was said to the cities of Judah, " Behold your " God ^c." He, who saw Jesus in the days of his humiliation, though he saw immediately his flesh or human nature only, yet really saw the Only Begotten of the Father. And notwithstanding his two natures, the Christian, by faith, discerns in him, one Mediator, and one person only : for his human nature had no separate subsistence of its own, but, from the first moment of its existence, was the human nature of the Son of God ; so strictly and intimately united to him, that what it did and suffered, was justly considered as done and suffered by Him, who was indeed God. The same individual person, was a child born, and the mighty God ^d. " He, who was in the form " of God, and no other, took upon him the form " of a servant ; and being found in fashion as a man, " became obedient to death ^e." He, therefore, who became obedient to death, was God ; though it was in his human nature, he yielded that obedience.

Marvellous and astonishing event ! The Creator takes into union with himself, a creature, not of the highest rank and order ; a spirit, dwelling in a cottage of clay ; nay, not the spirit only dwelling in flesh, but the flesh also ; and this, not when the nature united

to

^c Is. xl. 9.^d Is. ix. 6.^e Phil. ii. 6—8.

to him, was in its primitive glory, but when reduced to circumstances mean and wretched. He assumed a true body, subject to hunger, thirst, weariness, and other common sinless infirmities; and a reasonable soul, susceptible of fear, anger, sorrow, compassion, and every other innocent affection and passion of humanity.

The scripture conceals not the reasons, why God was thus manifest in the flesh. Thus he was fit to mediate peace, by his interest in both the parties at variance. Had he not been man, his terror in proclaiming to us the messages of heaven, would have made us afraid. Had he not been more than man, he would not have been great and honourable enough, to negotiate our cause with our injured Sovereign. He became our near kinsman, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, that the right of redemption might belong to him; that as by man came death, by man also might come the resurrection from the dead^e; and that, as the devil, by tempting the woman, had defiled the work of God, so God, by the woman's seed, might destroy the works of the devil. Without shedding of blood, there was no remission of sin^f. Forasmuch, therefore, as the children to be redeemed, were partakers of flesh and blood, the Son of God also took part of the same^g, that, by his death and sufferings, he might expiate our guilt. In consequence of this, his human nature was enabled to bear the wrath of God, without sinking under it: and the sufferings endured in that nature, became of infinite value, the person who suffered being God. The Lord of glory was crucified^h. The Church was purchased with the blood

^e 1 Cor. xv. 21.

^g Heb. ii. 14.

^f Heb. ix. 22.

^h 1 Cor. ii. 8.

blood of God ¹. Hence, too, the people of God have the more comfortable sense of the meekness, kindness, and gentleness of Christ, by contemplating his experience of human infirmities. He felt not indeed every particular grief which men feel; but he felt enough, to excite his sympathizing with them in every possible distress. Though he was never sick, yet, from weariness, pain, hunger, and thirst, the man Christ Jesus learned what the sick suffer. Though secured, by perfect holiness, from the torments of a self-condemning conscience, his bearing the wrath of God, as the surety of sinners, produced the tenderest pity for those thus tormented. I shall only add: The Son of God assumed our nature, with all its sinless infirmities, that, by his example, as well as doctrine, he might promote heavenly-mindedness, contempt of sublunary enjoyments, humility, patience, meekness, and forgiveness.

Perhaps some may inquire, How can it be said, God was manifest in the flesh? Did not the nature he assumed, and the purposes of humiliation and suffering for which he assumed it, obscure, rather than manifest, his Deity? Did he appear the everlasting Father, by becoming an infant of days; He, whom the heavens, and heavens of heavens, cannot contain, by being wrapt in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger; the Lord of the universe, by becoming a servant of rulers; the Holy One of God, by being charged with the monstrous crimes of deceit, rebellion, riot, and blasphemy; the Source of bliss, by becoming a man of sorrows, and being made a curse?—To all this I need only reply, that the expression, *God was manifest in the flesh*, is sufficiently justified, if the person who appeared, and was seen in a human body, was indeed God, though

most

¹ Acts xx. 28,

most who saw that body discerned not his deity. The splendour of God's majesty was too bright for mortals. It would have dazzled and blinded the eye, and struck the heart with unsupportable astonishment and dread. The excellent glory must be so tempered, by vailing it with flesh, that men might endure its lustre, and, without terror or alarm, converse freely with God.— If, however, in some circumstances of Christ's incarnation, meanness and abasement appeared; in others, divine majesty and greatness were manifested. Heaven and earth, angels and devils, kings and subjects, friends and enemies, united to do honour to his birth. God shakes the heavens and the earth, and shakes all nations, before the Desire of all nations comes ^j. A general expectation is raised, of an illustrious and universal monarch about to be born. At his birth, the oracles of the heathen become silent. Angels quit their native heavens, finding no transactions there, more worthy of their admiring thoughts, than those now commencing in our lower world. A new star appears to point out the incarnate God. The shepherds of Bethlehem, the wise men from the East, the venerable Simeon, the pious Anna, join their praises to those of the heavenly host; and talk, in rapturous strains, of the great things, which the child, born at Bethlehem, was about to accomplish. Let not, therefore, the incarnation of Christ, and the low afflicted circumstances in which he appeared, be any stumbling block to your faith. Beams of his majesty, as the Only Begotten of the Father, darted through his outward meanness, sufficient to convince the attentive spectator. His outward condition well suited the ends of his mission; which was designed to expiate our guilt,

^j Hag. ii. 6, 7.

guilt, and to bless us, in turning us away from our iniquities; not to conquer the Romans, and to erect a temporal monarchy. As our surety and sacrifice, his abasement was necessary: as our teacher and example, it was highly expedient. Many things, in God's government, which, considered separately, seem to have no beauty; when viewed in their connexion, appear transcendently glorious.

Let me now direct your attention to the practical improvement of this subject.

Judge not the opinions, or character, of any man, or society of men, by their outward circumstances. Despise not, for his birth, his poverty, or mean appearance, the man who teaches an excellent doctrine, or who exhibits an eminently virtuous example. Just ideas, and a correspondent behaviour, not wealth or indigence, are the true criterions of worth. Wisdom and virtue are not engrossed by the high and honourable. A fine sentiment is not a whit the worse, though first uttered by a man in rags. Contemn not thy brother on grounds, acknowledged, by thee, weak and frivolous, when pled by the Jews for contemning Jesus.

Turn aside, and contemplate, with sacred awe, God manifest in the flesh. The father of the faithful, struck with religious respect, fell on his face, when he saw some preludes of the incarnation. Jacob, upon a vision of the ladder, which was only an obscure figure of this mystery, cried out, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven *!" With what superior emotions of reverence and godly fear, should we, polluted dust and ashes, behold the Sovereign of the

* Gen. xxviii. 17.

the universe, descending from the height of his heavenly sanctuary, to tabernacle for a season, in our wretched and worthless world! With what profound veneration should we receive the visit of Him, who came in the name of the Lord our God to save us!

Think, how wretched and forlorn thy circumstances, which required so great and astonishing a mean of deliverance. We conclude the extremity of a distress, or the greatness of a danger, by the act or force employed to extricate out of them. What then must their misery be, to save whom, the Son of God took upon him the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man! Sinners could find no sacrifice sufficient to expiate their guilt; and yet, in order to their pardon, the justice of God, which he could not possibly renounce, demanded such a sacrifice. God's sending his Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and making him a sin-offering, must have been to accomplish, what the law, what man's obedience to the law, could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh.

Admire, and improve, this amazing condescension. Should the mightiest earthly potentate leave his throne, lay aside his royal robes, visit the tottering cottage of a beggar, place himself in his room, and, to save him from some imminent danger, put on his rags; should an angel, yea, should the whole hosts of heaven be degraded into the form of ugly and poisonous reptiles: the wonder would have been less; for, between the highest and lowest ranks of creatures, the distance is finite. But, that the Everlasting Father should be seen in a weeping suffering babe, was such a thought, as could never have entered into the heart of men or angels; or, if it had entered, could not have been entertained by them, without arrogance and blasphemy.

Z

Yet,

Yet, for our sakes, did Infinite Majesty stoop thus low. Think it not much, then, to stoop to the meanest office for Christ, or thy Christian brother. Deem it not abasement to serve him, for whom he, who was in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant. "He emptied himself, and made himself of no reputation¹." Let not false honour, let not a criminal shame, restrain thee from embracing any opportunity of usefulness. Learn from the Son of God, humility, condescension, and love to all thy brethren of mankind. God was manifest in the flesh, that in the flesh he might obey and suffer. Affect not independence. Murmur not at the precepts of God's law, or at the disposals of his providence; and let not that astonishing event, which hath united heaven and earth, and changed the face of the universe, leave thy heart unchanged.

Let the warmest gratitude inflame every breast, while contemplating the love which gave rise to this condescension. It was goodness in God, to bestow his favour and image on that, which, a little ago, was nothing. But, to become man, that rebels might be delivered from extreme and endless wo, was goodness still greater. Behold a creature, who perfectly knew his duty, and had sufficient ability to perform it, invested with dominion over this lower world, and advanced to fellowship with God himself: only, as a mark of homage to God, who gave him all things richly to enjoy, required to forbear the fruit of one tree: Behold that creature, on a trivial temptation, transgressing his duty, rebelling against his rightful Lord, and proving ungrateful to his best benefactor. Yet, even then, He, who could have glorified himself

¹ Phil. ii. 6, 7.

by punishing the guilty rebel, in his love and pity, visits and redeems him. The Only Begotten and well-beloved Son of God, a Son of the same nature with himself, besides whom, he never had, never could have another, comes in the flesh, to purchase, for worthless man, the adoption of children. The brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, comes to restore man to God's image. He, who, from eternity, knew only joy, that eternal sorrow might not be our portion, is made acquainted with grief. He is born, not to live and reign, but to suffer and die. Who can sufficiently admire and adore that Infinite Goodness, which, to exalt us, stooped so low! What tongue can utter, what heart can conceive, the length and breadth, the height and depth, of redeeming love! Praise your Redeemer with your lips. Say, with Mary, "My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour^m." Praise him with your lives; and let your conduct testify your high esteem of, and thankfulness for, his transcendent goodness.

Labour, that he who was manifested in your nature, may also be manifested in your persons: or, as Paul expresses it, "that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in your bodyⁿ." Copy after the spotless pattern of Jesus; and thus manifest to all men, that he is formed in you, and that you are animated by his Spirit. By tabernacled in your nature, the Son of God paved the way for dwelling in you, and abiding with you for ever. Give no rest to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till, in your hearts, a habitation is prepared for the mighty God of Jacob^o. Let those gates and everlasting doors be lifted

Z 2

up,

^m Luke i. 46, 47. ⁿ 2 Cor. iv. 10. ^o Ps. cxxxii. 4, 5.

up, that the King of Glory may come in ^P; and evidence to your own consciences, and to the world, that Christ is indeed in you, by living as the children of God, the brethren of Christ, the temples of the Holy Ghost, the companions of angels, and the heirs of glory. As the Son of God was heard, and seen, and looked upon, and handled; let the men of the world hear, and see, and feel, that you are the sons and daughters of God, by pious edifying discourse, by good works, and by the offices of piety and beneficence. God was manifest in the flesh, that he might destroy sin, and re-establish holiness and righteousness in the earth. He took on him the nature of man, that men might become partakers of a divine nature. Let a tender, circumspect, exemplary behaviour, discover that these important purposes are fulfilled in you.

Reflect, how highly human nature is dignified and ennobled, by the incarnation of the Son of God. Man was made at first a little lower than the angels; but, lo! the human nature is now advanced to an honour above the angelical. “For, verily, the Son of God took not upon him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham ⁹.” Take on you a holy state. Honour that nature, which God honoured. He assumed flesh and blood, in all their natural properties, resembling thine. Defile not thy body, so nearly related to that of the Lord of Glory. Debase it not, by enslaving it to sin and Satan. Defile not thy soul by pride, by malice, by revenge.

Improve and exult in the foundation laid, by God manifest in the flesh, for the encouragement of faith. It was for great and glorious purposes, that the Almighty

^P Pl. xxiv. 7.

⁹ Heb. ii. 16.

mighty and immortal God, appeared as a weak and mortal man. It was, that, where sin had abounded, grace might much more abound. It was, that conscience might be emboldened to approach the Judge of all the earth, with hopes of acceptance. Suck, O awakened soul! and be satisfied with this breast of consolation, which can never run dry. Never did any, in thy fearful, anxious circumstances, entertain too large expectations, from such condescending goodness and love. Despair not of escaping deserved vengeance; for, lo! God hath appeared to shield from it the very chief of sinners. Say not, thy wound is grievous, and thy bruise utterly incurable. Behold united, in the Surety for sinners, the nature that owed an infinite debt to Divine justice, and the nature which alone could pay it: the nature that could suffer and die, and the nature that could give to sufferings and death an infinite value. Repel every desponding thought; for He came to purchase salvation; and He now comes, in the gospel, to offer it, whose dignity the combined excellencies of creation could not equal, and whose sorrows were a full compensation for all the pains thou hast merited. Sink not under thy doubts and fears; for, to rescue sinners from destruction, He, who was in the bosom of the Father, pledged his heart as their ransom, that, as their advocate, he might approach to God, and successfully plead their cause. Art thou dead in trespasses and sins? The Source of life can easily impart it to thee. A mere creature, who was originally nothing, and who, had it not been for the will and power of another, would have remained nothing, cannot have in himself that infinite inexhaustible fulness of spiritual life, necessary for thus imparting it. Angels live, and are wise, and

Z 3

holy

holy and good. Yet they are not life, and wisdom, and holiness, and goodness. Their life is like the oil in the vessels of the wise virgins, who had none to spare for their companions. But the life, the eternal life which was with the Father, was manifested to men. He, in whom the fulness of the godhead, the fulness of life, dwells bodily, came, that the spiritually dead might live. And thou, O perplexed and anxious soul! art even now warranted, invited, commanded, to come to Christ, that thou mayest have life.

Trust, O believer, and be not afraid: for, behold! God is become thy salvation. It is true, thy multiplied, heinous, and highly aggravated transgressions, have offended God: But it is also true, God was manifest in the flesh, to make satisfaction for the offence. Thy sins were as crimson and scarlet; but the blood shed to wash thee from them, was the blood of God. Indulge, in the thoughts of this, a joy unspeakable and full of glory. “ Dreadful, indeed, it would be, “ for a sinner such as I am, to approach an absolute “ God, a consuming fire. But, God appearing in my “ nature, born of a virgin, lying in a cradle, sucking “ the breasts, sweating, and bleeding, and dying for “ me: opens to me a door of hope: conducts me to “ a fountain of comfort. The proclamation, *Your “ God hath come to save you*, strengthens my weak “ hands, confirms my feeble knees, and says to my “ fearful heart, Be strong; fear not. Manifold are “ my wants: but, in the fulness of my Immanuel, I “ am complete. I know in whom I believe. He is “ my friend, my kinsman, my brother, who feels for “ me the tenderest pity. He is God, who knows the “ things I need before I ask him; and can do for me “ exceeding

“exceeding abundantly beyond what I can ask or
“think. Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and
“why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in
“God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health
“of my countenance, and my God. Lo, this is our
“God; we have waited for him, and he will save
“us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him:
“we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation.”

PART II.

I endeavoured, on a former occasion, first to illustrate the doctrine of God manifest in the flesh, and then to direct you to the practical improvement of it.

I shall now consider Paul's description of this doctrine, as the pillar and ground of truth, and without controversy a great mystery of godliness.

That account is an encomium, not on the general system of Christianity, but on one particular doctrine, which was the foundation and security of all the rest: for the pillar and ground of truth, though a most necessary and important part of truth, is not the whole of it; even as the pillar or foundation of a building, is not the whole building. Some confine the description now to be considered, to the first proposition, *God was manifest in the flesh*, of which they think the five following propositions, of which many had been, and, as to some of them, still were eye witnesses, are only introduced as proofs. Others extend the description to them also. How far it is applicable to them, will better appear, when they are

particularly explained. It is sufficient for my present purpose, and admits no doubt, that it relates to the doctrine of God manifest in the flesh.

I. Paul describes this doctrine as a mystery. The word *mystery*, is borrowed from the secret religious rites and exercises among the Heathen, to which only a few, after trial of their secrecy, were admitted by the Hierophant or Mystagogue. Hence, it is transferred to the incarnation of Christ, and its important causes and consequences, which could be discovered only by the Spirit, not by our senses, imagination, or intellectual powers. To men, who had no other guide than nature's light, the wonders of redeeming love were wholly unknown: and unknown they must have for ever remained, had not the first stewards of the mysteries of God learned them by inspiration, and been authorised to teach them. Under the Old Testament, the Jews had only dark types, and obscure prophecies, of those good things to come. The wisdom of God in a mystery, was a hidden wisdom, which none of the princes of this world knew; for, had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory ^a. A veil was put over the face of Moses, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished ^b. They who prophesied of the grace which should come to us, knew not, or imperfectly knew, and therefore inquired and searched diligently, what, and what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow ^c. Hence, the apostle of the Gentiles represents the gospel as the mystery

^a 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 13.

^c 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations ^d, kept secret since the world began ^e, and from the beginning of the world hid in God ^f. It is with respect to the wonderful love displayed in the Son of God, rending the heavens, and coming down for our redemption, that Isaiah says ^g, "For, since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, besides thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." The prophet, or church, ardently longing for the incarnation of the Son of God, here addresses him as a distinct person from the Father. None, besides thee, O Son of God! hath known, what the Father hath prepared for those who wait upon him. The use which Paul makes of this prophesy, 1 Cor. ii. 9. confirms these remarks. Perhaps Isaiah's words are alluded to by John ^h: "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And more clearly by our Lord himself ⁱ: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." It was the apostles, who, according to the commandment of the Everlasting God, by explaining ancient prophecies, and comparing them with the events in which they were accomplished, made known this mystery to all nations ^j. How should we value the clear revelation of a plan, so highly important to the human race, which yet, before its execution, not to man only, but to principalities and powers in the heavenly places, was so imperfectly known! We might

^d Col. i. 25, 26.^e Rom. xvi. 25.^f Eph. iii. 9.^g Is. lxiv. 4.^h Jo. i. 18.ⁱ Math. xi. 27.^j Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

might have lived in one or other of the four thousand years which elapsed before the Gentiles heard the joyful sound : or in that long and gloomy period, when, by the corruptions of Popery, the glory of the gospel was obscured, and men removed from the grace of God unto another gospel. God is the Lord, who hath caused light to arise upon us ^k. This light, the enemies of the divinity and atonement of Christ may endeavour to extinguish : but, he who hath ordained a lamp for his Anointed, will clothe their efforts with shame ^l. “ Blessed be his name, when it seems evening, there shall be more abundant light ^m. ” “ Many shall run to and fro ; and knowledge shall be increased ⁿ. ” “ Yea, the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea ^o. ”

Again—The gospel is a mystery : for, to few who enjoy the external dispensation of the gospel, is its native beauty and divine energy inwardly revealed. Let it not seem strange, that at a time when it was preached to every creature ^p, Paul should represent it as a mystery only made manifest to God’s saints ^q. Saints only are divinely enlightened to perceive its certainty and glory. To some, Christ crucified is a stumbling-block ; and, to others, foolishness : and only, to them that are called, the wisdom of God, and the power of God ^r. The natural man, the man who has no other and better principles, than those derived from nature, or the improvement of nature, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him : neither can he know them, because they are

^k Pf. cxviii. 27.

^l Pf. cxxxii. 17, 18.

^m Zach. xiv. 7.

ⁿ Dan. xii. 4.

^o If. xi. 8.

^p Col. i. 23.

^q Col. i. 26.

^r 1 Cor. i. 24.

are spiritually discerned ^s. Puffed up, as many an unconverted sinner is, with his extensive learning, and particularly with his knowledge of divine things, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know ^t. He hath only a form of knowledge, and of the truth ^u. His carnal mind moulds the gospel into a shape less offensive to his pride or to his profligacy. If any man be in Christ, even with respect to knowledge, all things become new ^v. The things hid from the wise and prudent; through the sovereign pleasure of God, are revealed unto babes ^w. In such alone, the promises are fulfilled: "All the children shall be taught of the LORD ^x." "They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the LORD ^y." Blessed are they; for it is given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, when to others it is not given. Flesh and blood hath not revealed these things to them, but the Father which is in heaven ^z. For, Christians of all denominations, believe, and are sure, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God ^a. Though they may be incapable to answer the subtile objections of adversaries against those fundamental articles of faith, there is a glory in them, hid only from men, whose eyes the God of this world hath blinded, which convinces them of its divine original. It is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, who enables to discern their excellency, to believe their certainty, and to feel their energy. This heavenly Teacher, can give wisdom where he finds none; and, under his instruction, the dullest scholar

^s 1 Cor. ii. 14.^t 1 Cor. viii. 2.^u Rom. ii. 20.^v 2 Cor. v. 17.^w Matth. xi. 25, 26.^x Is. liv. 13.^y Jer. xxxi. 34.^z Matth. xiii. 11.; xvi. 17.^a Ja. vi. 69.

scholar needs not despair of making progress. Through his influence, the commandment of the Lord enlightens the eyes, and his testimony makes wise the simple. The deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind see out of darkness, and out of obscurity. We cannot, however, warrantably expect those influences, if we search not the scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation; and if we neglect the ordinances which were instituted to open the blind eyes, and to turn men from darkness to light.

II. The doctrine of our Lord's incarnation, and of its causes and consequences, is, without controversy, a great mystery.

It has not only been confirmed by the fullest evidence; but it is without controversy, to all to whom Jesus hath manifested the Father's name: for, as I have just now shown, they know that in a peculiar sense he is the Son of God, and came forth from God.

Well, too, may this doctrine be termed great. It exhibits truths in their own nature transcendently excellent. It is the history of the Equal and Fellow of the Almighty; of his journey from a throne to a cross, and thence to a throne again; and of the occasions, motives and effects of those astonishing transactions. It exhibits truths, to us sinful men, of infinite importance; brings to all nations glad tidings of great joy; points out the path of pardon to the guilty, of liberty to the captive, and of spiritual life to those dead in trespasses and sins. Great are these doctrines; for they have produced the greatest and most amazing revolutions in the tempers and lives of men. The eyes of the blind have been opened, the

ears

ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame man hath been made to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing, by waters thus breaking out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert ^b. The healing waters of the sanctuary change the bias of the heart, cure the most dangerous moral diseases, and turn the stream of the affections into a new and opposite channel. By this river, the streams whereof refresh and make glad the city of our God, contentment is produced in poverty, and peace and joy created in the depths of outward distress. This doctrine, even when preached in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling, has proved mighty through God to the pulling down the strong holds of sin and Satan. Great and glorious in itself, it has stamped a greatness and glory on those who receive it. For all, who, with open face, behold as in a glass the glories of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even by the spirit of the Lord ^c.

A learned and ingenious commentator has, however, argued, that the words, *without controversy*, cannot relate to the doctrine of the incarnation, considered as real or important, because in both respects it was controverted. It was denied in the apostolic age by the Gnostics, and has since been, and still is denied by many. And not a few seem insensible of the dignity and worth of this doctrine, who would not be thought to call in question its truth. He therefore thinks, that the words, *without controversy great*, respect only the greater mysteriousness of this doctrine, in which it differs from other articles of faith less mysterious. A great mystery is a doctrine, which passeth all understanding ^d; which, even when revealed,

^b 11. xxxv. 5, 6.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^d Phil. 4. 9.

revealed, remains a mystery; which cannot be connected with the truths of reason; and which, in a present state, none can clearly and fully conceive. Now, that the doctrine of the incarnation of the Son of God is thus inconceivable, not friends only, but enemies allow, the last rejecting that doctrine on account of its mysterious darkness. Whether this criticism is, or is not received, the distinction it was meant to establish, must be admitted. There are truths in the sacred oracles, which we knew not, possibly which we could not have known without revelation; which yet, now when revealed, we can clearly conceive, and, if not demonstrate their truth, at least show their possibility, from rational principles. But, there are other doctrines, which, though revealed, remain imperfectly understood. Another revelation would be necessary to disclose to us the inward nature of those doctrines, and their consistency with other truths. Probably our faculties are at present too weak and limited, for receiving and availing ourselves of such an explication, if it was vouchsafed.

I need not employ many words to show, that the doctrine of the incarnation is in this respect a great mystery. The person manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, &c. who can be no other than our Redeemer, is here expressly called God, without the least intimation that the word *God* must be used in a lower sense, than that in which it is ordinarily used. The person termed God, could not be manifested in the flesh, or render himself visible in human nature, if he had not united himself to that human nature. In this union, there are heights and depths, which, at least in this life, surpass the comprehension of our understandings, however purified and strengthened. For God mani-

fest

fest in the flesh, is not represented as a double or complex person, but, the being thus manifest, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, received up into glory, are ascribed to one person only. If the union of Christ with believers is termed a great mystery ^e, much more may we give this title, to the Word made flesh for man's redemption. Here, all is wonderful. The divine nature the same in all the persons of the Trinity; and yet the Son only made flesh. His two natures and their properties remain distinct; and yet these distinct natures and opposite properties belong to one person. The reputed son of a carpenter, is the real Son of God. He who created the universe, and fills heaven and earth, is shut up in a virgin's womb. The Everlasting Father becomes an infant of days. Descended from sinful men, he derives from them no corruption. Possessing, as God, infinite joy; he feels, as man, sorrow inexpressible.

This, however, will not excuse our stumbling at this wisdom of God in a mystery, these deep things of God ^f. If the words of a wise man are as deep waters ^g, it need not surprise, that one taught by inspiration the mystery of redemption, and who had made it his principal study, saw cause to cry out, O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ^h! The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable ⁱ. Their springs of action may be influenced by a thousand circumstances, unknown to their subjects, and yet, without the knowledge of which, the beauty and propriety of their conduct, cannot be discerned. Arrogant, therefore, they are, who pretend

^e Eph. v. 32.^f 1 Cor. ii. 7, 10.^g Prov. xviii. 4.^h Rom. xi. 33.ⁱ Prov. xxv. 3.

tend to fathom His counsels, who, in forming them, viewed every possible system of worlds, and series of events. Man, who is of yesterday, and knows nothing, takes too much upon him, when he dares to pronounce, that, in the wide extended creation, Omnipotence could not, for wise reasons, produce relations, and unions, and dependencies, which man cannot explain.—You ask, how a person infinite, self-existent and independent, and a nature finite, and produced in time, could be so joined as to constitute one person? You ask, how He, who gave being to every creature, could derive being from the work of his own hands? Resolve me first the easier question, how spirit and matter are so united, as to constitute one man? Or, if you cannot resolve it, be not surprised, that God is past finding out. You receive the witness of men, for a thousand appearances in nature and events in providence, which you cannot comprehend. You no more doubt a report from one, of whose sense and integrity you are satisfied, than you doubt the testimony of your own senses. Surely then His testimony deserves credit, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, who knows infinitely more than you know, and perfectly comprehends what to you is incomprehensible. If thou knowest not, how the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child^j; expect not to fathom the works, the counsels, the nature of Him, who maketh all things. In the eternity, omnipresence and foreknowledge of God, truths which even natural religion teaches, there are depths which you cannot penetrate. The knowledge of the manner of these things is too wonderful for you. It is high. You cannot attain to it^k. You cannot find out

^j Eccl. xi. 5.^k Ps. cxxxix. 6.

out the Almighty to perfection ¹. You are not wise enough to unfold those counsels, which were from of old, from everlasting. If the manifestations of God in nature and providence, are not without mystery, object not to mystery in the revelations of his grace. To God, as a Lord and Ruler, you are bound, to sacrifice estate, honour, ease, every outward enjoyment, however valuable, and even life itself. And is no submission and reverence due to God as a teacher? If your will should bow to his authority, by obeying unpleasant and difficult commands, tell me, if you can, is there any impropriety in your understanding doing homage to his wisdom, by believing what you cannot comprehend? Plead not, that a revelation of mysteries is useless, and that a rule of duty is the only thing important in religion. That is not useless, which, by discoveries beyond the reach of nature, abates the pride of knowledge, humbles man in his own eyes, excites his prayers for the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and inflames his longings for that state, when he shall no more see darkly and through a glass, but face to face, and shall know, even as he is known ^m.

The reasonings, therefore, of the enemies of mysteries, originate from pride of heart, not from soundness of judgment. To get rid of mysteries, one rejects the sacred volume, in which, he acknowledges, they are clearly contained. With an air of triumph, he demands, Why is not every doctrine in revelation free from darkness and difficulty? This is, indeed, to ask, Why man is not as wise as his Maker? Why his understanding is finite? Or, why what is finite cannot comprehend what is infinite? It would be an inquiry less foolish, why a child, of five years of age, can-

A a

not

¹ Job xi. 7.^m 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

not understand an intricate series of mathematical or philosophical propositions.—Another sets out with the same idea of the extent and strength of his understanding; but, unwilling to pronounce the apostles impostors or enthusiasts, or to deny the inspiration of their writings, proceeds by a road less direct to his conclusion. By forced unnatural criticism, he wrests scriptures to a sense, which, suitably to his ideas, banishes mystery from the gospel. He supposes, that he can express himself with greater clearness and accuracy, and better explain the mind of Jesus, than it was explained by his first disciples. If such men are in the right, they may claim the honour, without the least breach of modesty, that their depth of penetration has enabled them more clearly to disclose the nature, genius, and tendency of Christianity, than they who learned it from the mouth of Jesus, and were by him commissioned to teach it to the world. These seemed to say, that the doctrine of the cross was, to the wisdom of the world, foolishness; and that angels delighted to contemplate it, and more fully to know it. But the reformers of the eighteenth century teach, that the doctrine of the cross is easy to be understood; and that men of ordinary capacities may, with little study, know all of it, that is worth the knowing. Judge, whether you will credit the plain text of the apostles, or these men's ingenious, but strained, interpretations.

III. The doctrine of our Lord's incarnation is a mystery of godliness.

It is allowed, that truths, altogether unknown, and doctrines perfectly unintelligible, can be no motives to piety. But this notwithstanding, motives to piety may
be

be derived from that, in a mystery, which is known and understood. Though I cannot comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity, or the divinity and sonship of Christ, I may understand enough of the love of the Father, in sending his Son to be the Saviour of the world, and of redemption being purchased by his blood, powerfully to influence my temper and conduct. Articles of natural religion deeply affect, which yet are obscurely and imperfectly known. God, as the author and Lord of the universe, may be worshipped and served, though we cannot explain the connexion between the will of God, and the universe rising from nothing to existence. Obligations to Providence may be gratefully felt, though we are ignorant how God operates on bodies and spirits, and how he preserves every part of the system of nature, and the parts of every part. Men may be influenced, by believing that the soul shall exist in another state, whose knowledge of the human mind, and still more of the world to come, is imperfect.

Godliness, in the apostolic writings, signifies the fear and love of God, and the steady resolutions and endeavours, flowing from them, to do his will; and that mystery, which contains the strongest motives to godliness, and, when rightly believed, produces it, may well be termed a mystery of godliness.

Jesus's coming in the flesh, to obey and suffer, was intended, not only to restore to man the favour of God, but also conformity to his image and will. For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil ⁿ. He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ^o.

A a 2

He

ⁿ 1 John iii. 8.^o Titus ii. 13.

He was made a curse, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ^{P.}

Now, all this was revealed, that we might be sanctified through the truth. The view which it exhibits, both of the justice and goodness of God, affords the strongest motives to reverence of God's authority, value for his favour, trust in his mercy, and obedience to his laws. To thee, O presumptuous transgressor, it proclaims, that God is a consuming fire, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with indifference, and to suffer it to escape unpunished. The judgment inflicted by God on his dearly beloved Son, demands thy serving him henceforth with reverence and godly fear, and tells thee what must be the end of those who live ungodly. To you, who are weary and heavy laden, who say, our sins are upon us, we pine away in them, and how shall we live? it opens a door of hope, and prepares you for hearkening to the call, Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will you die? By inflaming gratitude, and by assuring you, that, through the purchased Spirit, your labours shall not be in vain, it lightens the yoke of duty, and bestows freedom, serenity, and delight in the worship and service of God. The astonishing discovery of the love of the Father, in sending his Son to rescue sinners from guilt and misery, may find men alienated from him, and enemies to him; but cannot, when suitably known and believed, leave them in that distance and enmity. A lively conviction, that we are beloved by one, whose rank and character we respect, by the instincts of nature, kindles a reciprocal affection, and a warm desire to preserve that love, and to express for it correspondent gratitude. How powerful, then, must be the influence of the

the sense of the love of God, in sending his Son, shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost! How sacred and venerable the precepts and sanctions of that law, which, God manifest in the flesh, hath, by his obedience and sufferings, magnified and made honourable! How transcendently excellent, and how tenderly affecting, the pattern the Saviour hath given, of love to God, benevolence to man, humility, meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and a self-denying, patient obedience! Rob not that pattern, my dear hearers, of its peculiar and distinguishing loveliness, and glory and efficacy, by imagining it the pattern of a mere creature, though of the highest order. Forget not the dignity of His person, to whose blood, merits, and intercession, you are indebted, for all you have in time, and hope for through eternity. Forget not, that He was infinitely near and dear to the Father, who, in his name, by his authority and appointment, came to save you. This, rightly remembered, will endear his example, recommend his precepts, and sweetly constrain you to love him, and to live to his praise. Strip religion of this mystery, and you strip it of that, which, above every other doctrine, kindles and cherishes the sacred flame of gratitude in the heart, and excites to run with cheerfulness and constancy in every path of commanded duty. The moments of temptation often leave little leisure for reflection, and hurry on to criminal indulgence, ere reason and conscience can exert their power. But the great mystery of godliness, requires no long and difficult recollection, is easily remembered, awakens attention, rouses from security, penetrates into the inmost recesses of the soul, and brings the affections into a willing captivity. "Shall
"I do this great wickedness, and sin against Him,

“ who was made man, lived and died, to deliver me
“ from going down to the pit? Shall I count any
“ duty difficult, any mortification rigorous, any suf-
“ fering severe, to testify my regards to Him, who,
“ though rich, for my sake became poor?” They
must be foolish and unbelieving, who feel not the ob-
ligations resulting from this mystery. The frame and
constitution of human nature, admits not such insensi-
bility, where it is indeed understood and believed.
Exclaim not, therefore, against that doctrine, as bar-
ren speculation; which, while it gives peace to con-
science, and firmness and elevation to hope, betters
also the heart, and amends the life. If thou art a
friend of virtue, keep it as the apple of thine eye; pre-
serve it sacred and inviolable. If it is denied, or, by
false interpretations, is explained away; the strongest
restraint from sin is removed, and holiness is deprived
of its chief nourishment. Difficult it often is, to main-
tain consciences void of offence towards God, and to-
wards man. Difficult to hold fast integrity, and not
let it go, notwithstanding the solicitations of indwel-
ling corruption, the assaults of the powers of darkness,
and the allurements and terrors of the world. Wrest
not from the Christian, the sword of the Spirit, which
is the word of God. Break not the point of that
sword; blunt not its edge. Weaken not the efficacy of
the word of God, by overlooking, or rejecting, the
animating truth, that God in our nature is the be-
liever’s captain and defence; and that he assumed our
nature, to save his people from their sins, to bruise
Satan underneath their feet, and to deliver them from
a present evil world.—Other principles may produce
a lifeless shadow of holiness, a form of godliness, with-
out the power thereof. Inward vital godliness they
cannot

cannot produce. The heart is first purified by faith in gospel mysteries; and, without this faith, spiritual life can be no more supported, than natural life without food. But these mysteries, seen in a true light, received as faithful sayings, and worthy of all acceptance, inspire corresponding sentiments, affections, and resolutions, and excite to a suitable practice. Spiritual light is accompanied with spiritual life and heat. It is impossible to understand and realize the wonders of redeeming love, and yet not love him who first loved us; or to love him, and yet habitually and presumptuously to trample under foot his authority, and do the evil and abominable thing which his soul hateth.

IV. The doctrine of the incarnation, is the pillar and ground of the truth: not of truth, or even religious truth in general, but of the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, in which that plan of redemption is published, which reason could never have discovered.

Much idle learning has been employed, in illustrating the word *pillar*, from the pillar of fire and cloud which directed the Israelites; from the pillars before judgment-halls, on which laws were often inscribed; and, from the pillars in the temple of Diana, at Ephesus, which, by the images and narratives there engraved, taught fables, idolatry, and immorality. But it cannot be ascertained, by any good rule of interpretation, that Paul alluded to those, or any other particular kind of pillars. The word *pillar*, by itself, suggests no more, than that wood, or stone, on which part of a building rests, and is thereby preserved from sinking, or falling. A doctrine is the pillar of other truths, which supports and defends them, and which

must be maintained, if we would not weaken their authority.

The original word rendered *ground*, occurs nowhere else in the sacred writings. By its derivation, however, it evidently signifies, that upon which any thing firmly rests. Here, therefore, where it relates to a building, and is joined to the word *pillar*, it means foundation. A pillar only supports part of a fabric. A foundation bears the weight of the whole building.

The metaphor intimates, that the doctrine of the person and incarnation of Jesus, is a necessary support to the whole doctrine of redemption, which, if taken away, that also must fall to the ground. Every other article of faith rests upon, and derives stability from its connexion with this. If the Son of God did not assume a true body and a reasonable soul; he was not the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. Sins could not be forgiven through his blood, who had no blood to shed: his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, were appearances only, not reality. Jesus could be no more than a divine messenger, sent to teach men the dispositions and duties by which they were to save themselves. Man, by the proper exertion of his own powers, could cure his moral disorders, and recommend himself to the Divine favour. All this was accordingly taught by the ancient heretics, who denied the incarnation. By their system, Jesus was only an æon, sent from above, to teach souls, imprisoned in bodies by the evil principle, to whom they ascribed the creation of the material world; how, by enfeebling their impure bodies, they might free themselves from that prison, and render themselves worthy of ascending to the mansions of the
supreme

supreme God.—The doctrine of redemption is equally destroyed, by modern systems, which acknowledge, that Jesus was partaker of flesh and blood, but deny his proper divinity. Very consistently with this fundamental error, these systems assert, that the death of Christ was no atonement of infinite value; and that, indeed, no such atonement was necessary, the guilt of sin being in no sense infinite.

Do we require proof that the incarnation is a fundamental doctrine? Paul, who expected soon to see Timothy, lest he should tarry longer, instructs him how to conduct himself in the church of the living God; and particularly, what subjects of discourse were most necessary and important. And he does it thus: “A pillar and foundation of truth, is that great mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh.” Doth not this show how deeply Paul was concerned, that all the hearers of the gospel should know, believe, and be deeply affected with this doctrine? The beloved disciple, proposes this mystery as the great criterion for distinguishing true ambassadors of Jesus from false teachers. “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God: and this is that Spirit of Antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and, even now, already it is in the world &c.” In those early times, some, who acknowledged the divine mission of Jesus, disputed against his personal dignity, or his assumption of human nature. John, in his gospel, had confuted their opinion, from the words of Jesus himself; and, in his epistle, declares, that he considered

dered those who maintained that opinion, not as Christians, but as enemies and opposers of Christ. It is the glory of our religion, that it reveals a plan by which sin is pardoned, in a way honourable to the Divine perfections, and government, and which gives no encouragement to future transgression : as an indemnity to offenders, barely on account of repentance and reformation, must have done. Our being delivered from going down to the pit, by Jesus paying for us a ransom of infinite value, falls to the ground, if his blood was not shed, or if it was not the blood of the Son of God. But, if a person so glorious was treated as a sinner, that we might be treated as righteous ; deeper impressions must be made of the spotless purity, and tremendous justice of God, on every mind capable of just reflection, than if the transgressor, in his own person, had suffered the just reward of his deeds, or even if a world of transgressors had been doomed to the vengeance of eternal fire.

The first thing in a building, is the laying the foundation ; and the first thing peculiar to Christianity, which the apostles taught, was, the incarnation of Jesus, and his redeeming us to God through his blood : though, to pave the way for this truth being received, they also inculcated the principles and obligations of natural religion, and the evidences of Christianity, from prophecy and miracles. Thus, Paul acquaints the Corinthians ¹, “ Moreover, brethren, I
“ declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto
“ you, which also you have received, and wherein
“ you stand. By which also ye are saved, if ye keep
“ in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye
“ have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you,
“ *first*

“first of all, that which I also received, how that “Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures.” Peter, in his first sermon to the house of Israel, tells them, God had made Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ: and, in his next sermon, charges them with having killed the Prince of Life ^f. Human policy first presents the fair and favourable side of a system; begins her lessons with what is most plain and agreeable, and proceeds, by slow steps, to what is more difficult and unpleasant. Not so, the first disciples of Jesus. They well knew, that many would consider them as men of disordered brains, for combining the ideas of God and flesh, eternity and birth, immensity and a manger, a shameful death, and bringing many sons unto glory. They were sensible, that Christ crucified for the salvation of sinners, was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. The wisdom of the world would suggest, that the preaching of the cross, at least the delivering that doctrine to their hearers first of all, tended instantaneously to raise prejudice, and to expose them and their religion to contempt. Had they been impostors, they would never have formed so unpromising a plan for gaining proselytes. But, knowing they were Christ’s ambassadors, instead of walking in craftiness, and handling the word of God deceitfully, they strictly adhered to the instructions of their Lord and Saviour, whose almighty power, they were satisfied, could procure reception to their message; and, surely, such manifestation of the truth, would better commend modern teachers to every man’s conscience in the sight of God, than omitting,

or

^f Acts ii. 36.; iii. 13.

or disguising in sermons, or chatechetical instructions, those great things of the gospel.

But, why do I speak of omissions or disguise? There are many, who declaim against that doctrine as an uncertain speculation, of little or no importance, which the apostles so often represent as the very foundation of Christianity. But, if Jesus was divinely commissioned, even for no other purpose than to enlighten and reform mankind; surely, he would not have inculcated upon the apostles, as worthy of all acceptance, and the great mean of advancing holiness and virtue, what was either opposite to truth, or what had no tendency to promote right dispositions and conduct. Jesus was too wise, to address his familiar friends by pompous and abstruse language, which they could not understand: or to attempt enlightening the world, by involving himself in a darkness, which deceived even those, who had the best opportunities and advantages for understanding him. If the apostles understood not, what Jesus had often, and in the plainest manner repeated to them, and so mistook the mind of their Master, as to imagine he was revealing mysteries, when he was only enforcing moral precepts: their dulness and stupidity must have rendered them very incompetent witnesses of what he taught. If they deliberately misrepresented, what they sufficiently understood; they must have been detestable impostors. On either supposition, their Master was neither prudent, nor fortunate, in employing them to communicate his instructions to others. If the passages of the New Testament, which assert the truth or importance of the mystery of redemption, were, after the deaths of the apostles, inserted in their writings by ill-designing men: the use of divine revelation is destroyed; and

and men may ascribe what part of the New Testament they choose, to Christ and his apostles; and attribute what they dislike, to those corrupters of their writings. If doctrines are contained in the genuine text of scripture, and are so interwoven with the whole of revelation, that, if they are denied, revelation must fall to the ground: our dark and imperfect conceptions of those doctrines, and the difficulties we find of reconciling them with other truths, are no reasons for our explaining words and phrases, in a manner opposite to their natural meaning, to the connexion in which they stand, or to the general system of the sacred oracles. Passages in Plato's Dialogues, obscure and hard to be understood, would not vindicate giving them an interpretation, which the grammatical import of the words, or the known ideas of that philosopher, do not admit. Yet, by the arts used to torture texts, which prove the divinity and atonement of Christ, a subtle genius may find any thing in any writer; the doctrines, for instance, of Epicurus, in the Dialogues of Plato, or the Meditations of Marcus Antoninus. They, therefore, who arraign the doctrine of the incarnation, if they would reason consistently, must either deny the truth of the Christian revelation, or maintain that it is dark and obscure, and an insufficient rule of faith and practice. With no greater justice, can such claim the Christian name, than others might pretend to be Platonists, or Stoics, who rejected the distinguishing opinions of those schools, and only received, what they held in common with Epicureans.

And now, what is the conclusion of the whole matter?

Think

Think it not strange, that the gospel often meets with bad entertainment, that some pronounce the mysteries of it foolishness, and others account the godliness these mysteries tend to produce, an unsupportable yoke. The sentiments and practices of a world, accustomed to speak evil of things which they know not, are probably wrong, at least are a dangerous and deceitful guide. Form your ideas of the great mystery of godliness, not by the system which chances to be most fashionable, or most popular; not by the changeable opinions of fallible men; but by that word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. Study the sacred volume, which is able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. As this mystery is peculiarly made manifest to the saints, ye, who would understand it, look to it, that you are indeed saints. The gospel reveals a high way to salvation, which the unclean shall not pass over, while the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein ^t. Preserve the mystery of faith, in a pure conscience ^u. Endeavour, by conversing with living saints, and perusing the writings of dead ones, to supply what is wanting in your knowledge. If angels learn from the church ^v, and a Paul expected improvement by conversing with the Christians at Rome ^w: let not the best instructed despise opportunities of learning from men of meaner talents. The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee ^x. The mystical body of Christ must grow up to its full stature, by that which every part supplieth ^y. The church, in one age and country, may often greatly avail herself of the light and knowledge of the church in another.

Above

^t Is. xxxv. 8.

^u 1 Tim. iii. 9.

^v Eph. iii. 10.

^w Rom. i. 11, 12.

^x 1 Cor. xii. 21.

^y Eph. iv. 16.

Above all, remember, that none teacheth like God. Ask, therefore, wisdom of Him, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given you ^z.

Learn, from this subject, to distinguish true religion, and genuine piety, from counterfeit appearances. Heathenism and Popery have their mysteries; but they are mysteries of iniquity. Socinianism extols piety and virtue; but renounces the mysteries which alone can produce them. True Christianity reveals mysteries, to humble pride, and, at the same time, to mortify and subdue corrupt inclinations. The religion of some is all in their understandings, and never penetrates to their hearts. Their knowledge is barren and unfruitful. Of the Trinity, incarnation, and atonement, they can discourse learnedly. The recovering the image of God, and fellowship with him, and being saved from the dominion of sin; though chief ends of the coming of Christ, are none of their care. Others, who imagine themselves pious and holy, having no light and discernment in the mysteries of the kingdom, are hurried on, by a blind zeal, to a faith and practice, in which there is no beauty, harmony and regularity. Faith and godliness, light and heat, must be united in the true Christian. Piety, without mystery, wants her most effectual motive, and firmest support. And the mystery of godliness will soon be corrupted, when men receive not the truth in the love of it, but imprison it in unrighteousness.

Entertain this doctrine suitably to its nature.

It is a mystery. Affect not to be wise above what is written. Admire and adore, what thou canst not fully comprehend. Let thy understanding do homage to

^z Ja. i. 5.

to the divine testimony. Receive this doctrine, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of the living God.

It is a mystery of godliness. By indulging ease and security, while profligate and immoral, act not as if it was a mystery of iniquity. Remember that mere speculative knowledge will damn, not save thee. Suffer the truth to have its proper and full influence on thy temper and behaviour. Adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, that they who believe not the word, may be won by thy amiable and exemplary conversation.

It is the pillar and ground of truth. Prize that gospel, which has published to thee a doctrine so transcendently glorious and important. Count all things else loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Every thing in the world, yea, the world itself, will be little and inconsiderable in thine eyes, if this mystery is seen by thee in its true greatness. Bless the Lord, who hath caused light to arise upon thee; and pity and pray for those who yet remain in darkness.

APPEN.

APPENDIX.

THE COMMON READING 1 TIM. iii. 16. VINDICATED.

SOME, who deny the divinity of Christ, to blunt the force of the argument in favour of that doctrine, from the words *God was manifest in the flesh*, allege, that the word *God*, Θεός, was by some blind zealot foisted into the text after the apostolic age; and that the true reading is, either ὁς, as in five manuscripts of some antiquity, or ὁ, as in the old Clermont manuscript at Cambridge, and probably as in the seven manuscripts, from which the Vulgate, the Arabic published by Erpenius, both the Syriacs, the Coptic, the Armenian, and the Ethiopian versions, are translated. But, is it fair, to prefer a reading in five manuscripts; or a second, by the most favourable reckoning, only in eight; to a third, in an hundred? ὁς cannot be the true reading; for there is no preceding word, to which it can refer. The rules of grammar do not admit, that the neuter, μουσειον, should be antecedent to the masculine ὁς. ὁ will indeed better connect with μουσειον. But the allowing the authority of eight manuscripts in support of that reading, is a concession much too liberal. I shall say nothing of the Clermont manuscript. The examining its authority, and its genuine reading in this passage, is too long and difficult an investigation for an appendix. The testimony of the above mentioned translations, is

far from decisive. The Arabic, published by Erpenius, must be struck out from the list, as it was only made from the Syriac; whereas, an excellent Arabic translation from the Greek, published by Walton, confirms our reading. The reading, in the manuscript used by the published Syriac version, is uncertain: for the author employs the word *dalyth*, which often has the same signification as the Greek $\delta\lambda$: he may therefore have read $\Theta\iota\omicron\varsigma$, and yet not set it down, because it occurred a little before. The unpublished Syriac is of still less weight, if Wetstein is in the right, that many absurd readings were added to it by Thomas Charckell. Equally strong exceptions to the evidence from the other four versions, may be found in Bengelius's *Apparatus*, and in Baumgarten's *Vindiciæ vocis* $\Theta\iota\omicron\varsigma$, 1 Tim. iii. 16. Hall. 1754. The testimony of almost all the Greek and Eastern fathers, who read $\Theta\iota\omicron\varsigma$ as we do, deserves greater regard, than that of Latin fathers not earlier than the fourth century, very imperfectly acquainted with the Greek, and who therefore adopted, what they found in the Latin version, the word *quod* instead of *Deus*. It is not clear, that *quod* there signifies *that*: it may also be translated *because*, or *since*. And then the sense will be, "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, *because*, or *since*, he" (*i. e.* the living God, mentioned a little before) "was made manifest in the flesh." The variety of readings is easily accounted for, if we suppose $\Theta\iota\omicron\varsigma$ the original reading: for, when that word was contracted into $\Theta\Sigma$, a transcriber might neglect, or write faintly, the middle stroke in the first of these letters; and another might hence naturally suppose that the word was $\delta\varsigma$. A third, observing that $\delta\varsigma$ would make the sentence ungrammatical,

matical, might change it into δ . Now, they who think δ ; or δ , the true reading, cannot so easily account for either of those being changed into $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$. The supposing $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ a designed falsification, is altogether unreasonable; for there was no temptation to it; that name being given to Jesus, in texts, where the reading is uncontroverted. Wetstein indeed appeals to Liberatus, Hincmar, and Fulbert, as relating, that, to favour the Nestorians, Macedonius, in the sixth century, changed δ ; to $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$; for which falsification of scripture, he was deposed and banished by Anastasius. I will not repeat what has been urged by Pearson, Bentley, Baumgarten, and Pfoffius, to demonstrate the ridiculousness of this charge. It cannot be true; for the writings of the Greek fathers, long before the sixth century, prove that $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ was the reading in their copies. If these testimonies prove that Macedonius corrupted this passage, they equally prove that the corruption was discovered, and the true reading restored. How then can it be accounted for, that almost all our manuscripts have $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$, not δ ;?—Internal probability also favours the common reading; according to which, nothing is asserted, which does not perfectly correspond with other texts of scripture, which speak of “the Word as made flesh”—“the Son of God as “come in the flesh,” &c. That δ ; cannot be the true reading, has been already proved. If we read δ ; $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\iota\omicron\nu$, the antecedent to δ , must either mean a doctrine, or a person. If mystery means a doctrine, as it generally does in the sacred volume; what can we make of these words, “Great is the mystery of godliness, which was manifest in the flesh—and received “up into glory?” Or, if we less naturally interpret mystery, of a person, and suppose that the Redeemer

is termed the mystery of godliness : they who deny his divinity, will gain nothing : as he who is first styled the mystery of godliness, is evidently distinguished from the flesh in which he was manifested, and therefore must possess something greater and more mysterious, than that flesh or humanity. Wetstein, to avoid some of these difficulties, conjectures that the word *ratio* should be inserted before *et*, and that the passage should be rendered thus : “ The mystery of godliness “ is great ; that which was manifested in the flesh, “ was justified in the spirit,” &c. But no manuscript authorises this conjecture. No account can be given, why the apostle speaks of Jesus (of whom this hypothesis acknowledges that he speaks) in this unusual manner, “ that which was manifest in the flesh ;” and does not rather say, “ Jesus was justified in the spirit ;” or, “ he who was manifest in the flesh, was “ justified in the spirit.” Should we even suppose, that speaking of Christ as a thing, and not as a person, was natural ; still, the words, “ that which was “ manifest in the flesh,” suppose that he, who was manifested in human nature, had another nature, superior to that in which he was manifested.

I have abridged these criticisms from the learned Mosheim’s German commentary on this epistle. The absurd attempts of some older Socinians, who disputed not the common reading of this scripture, to reconcile it with their ideas of the person of Christ, are well exposed in Dr Abbadie’s ingenious Treatise on the Divinity of Christ, sect. 3. chap. 2.

DISCOURSE XI.

JESUS JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT.

I TIMOTHY iii. 16.

GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH, JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT.

FROM these words, I shall first explain how the Divine Person, manifested in the flesh, was justified in the spirit; and then direct you to the practical improvement of the subject.

I. Justifying, is the absolving from a charge, and pronouncing innocent. Thus wisdom is justified of her children. They clear her from the accusations of her enemies, and declare their sentiments of her, as excellent and lovely.

Some think, that *the spirit* here means the divine nature of Christ, because it is opposed to *the flesh*, in which he was manifested; for which reason, they interpret the word spirit in the same manner, because distinguished from his humanity in other three passages of scripture: “^a How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” “^b Who was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by

B b 3

“ the

Heb. ix. 14.

^b Rom. i. 3, 4.

“ the resurrection from the dead.” “ c Christ was
 “ put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spi-
 “ rit.” Others think, that the Spirit here means the
 Holy Ghost, the third Person of the Trinity. A de-
 tail of the criticisms, by which both interpretations
 have been ably supported, would be unedifying to ma-
 ny; and the giving either a preference is needless; as,
 in both senses, Jesus was justified by the Spirit.

But, *from what charge was he justified?* It is an
 important truth, that, by his glorious resurrection, and
 the consequent outpouring of the Spirit, he was de-
 clared absolved from the sins, which were laid upon
 him, as our surety and substitute. He bore our sins
 in his own body on the tree. He was made a curse
 for us. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin.
 But, as he bore, so he expiated our guilt. He freely
 paid the debt we owed to Divine Justice, and ceased
 not to suffer, till he could say, *It is finished.* The debt
 being paid, the bonds of death are loosed, the prison
 of the grave is opened, and the surety is released, and
 receives a full discharge: All this was through his di-
 vine nature. That enabled him, to offer himself an ac-
 ceptable sacrifice to God. For, had he not been the
 brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image
 of his person, he could not thus by himself have pur-
 ged our sins. Probably, however, our text relates to
 the charge brought against Jesus, by the ignorance
 and malice of men, rather than to that brought against
 him by the justice of God.

I observed in a former discourse, that God was
 manifest in the flesh, not only as he assumed human
 nature, but as he assumed it in circumstances of the
 lowest abasement. He had no form nor comeliness

in

in him, why he should be desired. Poverty, reproach and persecution, veiled, from the carnal eye, the glories of his divinity. He was in the world, and the world was made by him : yet, such was his outward meanness, the world knew him not. They imagined him a blasphemous impostor, who falsely pretended that he was indeed the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Now, from these charges, he was justified by the Spirit, whether we understand by spirit his divine nature, or the Holy Ghost.

1. He was justified by his divine nature, or by those beams of divinity, which often broke forth and brightly shone, in his darkest nights of humiliation and suffering. He did not display his royalty by a splendid equipage, by sumptuous entertainments, or by advancing his followers to worldly honours. But he displayed it more gloriously, by giving, what no earthly prince could give, health to the diseased, life to the dead, virtue to the profligate, and pardon to the guilty. Though a poor and mean woman was his mother, he was conceived and born of a virgin, the Holy Ghost coming upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowing her. Though born in a stable, and laid in a manger, the wise men of the East, taught by a supernatural star, discover deity amidst this abasement. Nay, an innumerable multitude of the heavenly host, join together in solemnizing his seemingly ignoble birth. He spoke and acted, not as a man only, but as God. When he discovered human infirmity, he also discovered divine glory and power. He was tempted of the devil. But the devil could not enter the most despicable animal, without his permission. As a man he hungers, and is maintained by the kindness of pious women, who ministered to him

of their substance. As God, he miraculously feeds thousands with a few loaves and fishes. He is baptized by John. But, at his baptism, the Father proclaims, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." One moment, weary with labour, he falls asleep; a great storm of wind arises, the waves beat, and the ship where he sleeps seems ready to sink. But, in that dangerous crisis, he rebukes the wind; says to the sea, Peace, be still: and lo! the storm is turned into a calm, at his command and will. By paying tribute to Cæsar, he appears a servant of rulers. By causing a fish fetch him the tribute money, he manifests, that the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea, were under his dominion. Did the character and circumstances of his disciples obscure his glory? His determining them with a word to forsake all, and follow him, evidenced, that even the hearts of men are in his hand, and that he turneth them which way soever he will. The foolishness of God appears wiser than man, and the weakness of God stronger than man, when he bestowed on those his despised followers, miraculous powers, and a mouth and wisdom which their enemies could not gainsay or resist. As a partaker of flesh and blood, he hath compassion on the wretched. As God, he relieves them. His humanity is touched with the cries and supplications of the blind, the lame, the lepers: But the hand stretched out in their behalf, was the hand of the Almighty. He wills, and the blind see; the lame walk; and the lepers are cleansed. He sympathizes, as man, with the weeping widow of Nain. Through his power as God, the only son, who was carrying to his grave, is restored to his mother. As man, he weeps at the grave of his

beloved

beloved Lazarus. As God, he speaks with power, "Lazarus, come forth!" When apprehended as a malefactor, he demonstrates, that no man could have taken his life from him, if he had not of himself been willing to lay it down. He asks those sent to apprehend him, Whom seek ye? and instantly they went backward, and fell to the ground. If men insult his sufferings: the sun is darkened, the earth trembles, and all nature seems convulsed, when the Lord of nature suffers. When, by the sentence of earthly judges, he is nailed to the accursed tree: even then he spoils principalities and powers, and makes a show of them openly, triumphing over them on the cross. When pouring out his soul unto death, he divides a portion with the great, and divides the spoil with the strong. He saves others, when his enemies scornfully say, that himself he could not save. He hangs on a cross between two thieves, who, in the beginning of his crucifixion, profanely joined in reproaching and upbraiding him. By an act of unmerited and almighty grace, he rescues one of them as a brand out of the burning; convinces him that he was a Prince and Saviour, and bestows upon him a place in paradise. When brought to the dust of death, and seemingly overcome: invisibly he conquers, and by death destroys death, and him that had the power of it, even the devil.

Perhaps some may plead, that the miracles of Jesus, prove indeed that he was an embassador sent from God; but no more prove his deity, than the deity of the apostles can be proved, from their doing the works that Christ did, and even greater works than these, according to his promise, Jo. xiv. 12. The preceding part of that chapter, where our Lord argues

argues from his miracles, that he was in the Father, and the Father in him, and that he who had seen him, had seen the Father, suggest a sufficient, though short reply to that objection. So far were the apostles from claiming deity, that they abhorred and rejected the divine honours, some offered them. Jesus wrought miracles, and professed to work them in his own name, and by his own power; the apostles declared, that they wrought them, only in the name, and by the power of Jesus.

2. Jesus was justified; and the charges of enthusiasm or imposture, which ignorance or malice brought against him, were confuted by the Holy Ghost. The characters of the Messiah, which inspired prophets had delineated, fully proved, that Jesus was indeed the Christ. His Spirit that was in them, testified, long before his appearance, the time, place, and manner of his birth; the circumstances of his life and death; his deep humiliation and abasement; and the glory which should follow. John, who was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb, pointed him out as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. At his baptism, the Holy Ghost descended as a dove, and rested upon him, even as the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and might; the Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord. God gave not to him the Spirit by measure; but so anointed him with the Holy Ghost, and with power, that he spoke as never man spoke; healed all manner of sickness and disease; by the Spirit of God cast out devils; and appeared mighty in word and in deed, before God and all the people.—Yet, it was chiefly after his resurrection, that the Spirit bore witness to his Divine mission. Till then,

then, *the Holy Ghost was not yet given*, in so plentiful a measure of his miraculous gifts or gracious influences, *because Jesus was not yet glorified* ^a. Hence, he tells his disciples ^b, *But when the Comforter* ^c *is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.* How amazing the small progress which the apostles made in knowledge, under the personal ministry of the Son of God ! When their Master speaks of his approaching sufferings, Peter rebukes him, and says, “ Be it far from thee : let not “ this thing come unto thee.” Here, as in the mount of transfiguration, he wist not what he spoke ; for, if our Lord had hearkened to his counsel, he, and we, must have been for ever miserable. But, when the Spirit is poured out upon him, he glories in that, which formerly he accounted foolishness. “ There-
“ fore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly,
“ that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have
“ crucified, both Lord and Christ ^d.” Illiterate fishermen, never bred up at the feet of any Gamaliel, are suddenly enabled to speak to men of various nations, in their respective languages, the wonderful works of God. Their false ideas of religion cease ; they are led into all truth : and, though they had behaved in the most dastardly manner, when their Lord was apprehended ; now, when danger was greater, were bold and intrepid. They preach the gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, in his gracious operations and miraculous gifts. Thousands are converted by one sermon. Many, even of those who had imbrued

^a Jo. vii. 39.^b Jo. xv. 26.^c It might better be rendered the Advocate.^d Acts ii. 36.

imbrued their hands in the blood of Jesus, are pricked to the heart, and cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Signs and wonders were wrought by the apostles, in the name of the holy child Jesus: and, by the laying on of their hands, many of the first converts to Christianity, were enabled to prophesy, to heal the sick, to work other miracles, or to speak languages, which they had never learned. Let it not be alleged, that the apostles only pretended to, and did not possess, the supernatural powers to which they appealed, in proof of their Master's resurrection. Had that been the case, a claim so notoriously false, would have confuted itself, and justly exposed the men who urged it, to universal derision. When Paul solemnly told the Corinthians ^e, "Truly, the signs of an apostle were wrought among you, in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds:" if the reverse had been true, must not every Corinthian have despised the folly of Paul, or detested his impudence? If the miraculous extraordinary gifts of the Spirit had not been bestowed on many in that church, he must have lost all credit, by writing a grave epistle, in which he directs them how to exercise those gifts, and censures their abuse of them. The blessed fruits, which, through the influences of the Spirit, the religion of Jesus has in all ages produced in the hearts and lives of true believers, are a farther justification of the claims of its Author. That doctrine must be of God, which forms the depraved heart to his love and likeness, inspires hatred of sin, and excites fervent desires after perfection in holiness.

Such miraculous changes in the natural and moral world, were full and clear evidences that Jesus was indeed

^e 2 Cor. xii. 12.

indeed risen from the dead, and ascended up to heaven, as he could not otherwise have poured down the Spirit from thence on his followers. An impostor, who had promised that he would rise from the dead on the third day, but who had not in truth thus risen, could not have endued his disciples with miraculous powers, and could not have cured the deep-rooted disorders of their understandings and hearts.—But, the witness of the Spirit to the Deity and Messiahship of Jesus, is too large a subject for illustrating to advantage in a single discourse. These short hints, however, may, I hope, assist your private meditations, on the various branches of that argument.

A few reflections on what hath been said, shall conclude this discourse. Did beams of divinity shine in the darkest nights of Christ's humiliation? And did the outpouring of the Spirit declare him to be indeed the Son of God? We may hence infer, that, though he was a teacher sent from God, the chief design of his visiting this earth, was higher and more important; even that, through his blood and merits, sinners might be pardoned and accepted. One of less dignity, could have communicated to mankind a divine revelation, and confirmed it by his death. In fact, the Christian, as well as Mosaic religion, was taught and established by mere men: for it was established, not so much by Christ while he lived on earth, as by his apostles. The instructions of his personal ministry, extended not to Heathen nations, were despised by the bulk of the Jews, and left his disciples under much remaining ignorance, not removed till the outpouring of the Spirit, after his ascension ^f. The apostles were

to

^f See Jo. xvi. 12—14.

to do greater works than Christ ^h. This, whether we explain it of their miracles, or of their doctrine, and the effects of it in converting men, proves, that the Son of God was sent to be the Saviour of the world, not merely as he was sent, to deliver it by his doctrine from ignorance and error. For, if he had acted on earth only as a teacher, the apostles would have had an equal title to the character of Saviours, as, under their ministrations, true religion was more fully understood, and more eagerly embraced. But, the Equal and Fellow of the Almighty, had another work to perform, in the glory of which, no mere man could share. The chief of the apostles could not redeem his brother, or give to God a sufficient ransom for his soul.

Was Immanuel justified in the Spirit? Banish thy fears, O Christian, and cherish the pleasing hope, that his cause, and the cause of his church, shall at length be fully justified in the eyes of all men. The Sun of righteousness, though in the morning he may be darkened with clouds, shall gradually dispel, or break through them all, and in due season shine forth gloriously in his meridian splendour. The success of Christ's personal ministry was inconsiderable. He laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought, while Israel was not gathered. But when, after his ascension, the Spirit takes of the things of Christ, and shews them to men; a little one becomes a thousand, and a small one a great nation. They who had condemned and crucified Jesus, now condemn themselves, justify him, and see and acknowledge his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth. They, who accounted his apo-

stles

^h Jo. xiv. 12.

stiles and followers the filth of the earth, and the off-scourings of all things, receive them as an angel of God, and, if it were possible, would pluck out their eyes, and give unto them. How encouraging this, when religion is at a low ebb, and when the character of the Christian is unjustly traduced! The path of the just, of Christ the King of saints, and of all the members of his mystical body, is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. God will bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon day.

In the mean time, let your temper and conduct justify those claims of Jesus, which others reject and condemn. Justify his claim of divinity. Trust in him at all times; pour out your souls before him; and make him your refuge. Justify him, as indeed the Prophet like unto Moses; as the great High Priest of your profession; and as the King whom God hath set over his holy hill of Zion. Receive the law; receive the gospel from his mouth; and treasure up his words in your heart. Build your hopes of acceptance with God, only on his sufferings and merits. Trust not in your own obedience: for this is saying that righteousness comes by the law, and that Jesus died in vain. Submit to the government of Jesus. Acknowledge all his commandments, concerning all things, to be right; and acquiesce in all the dispensations of his providence, as holy, just, and good.

Did Jesus, by the Spirit, justify his claims? Under the influence of the Spirit, justify your pretensions to the character of Christian, and display the excellency of that character. The world is ready to slander Christianity, as a weak and impotent, or as a dull and melancholy thing. Beware of justifying, by your conduct,

duct, these flanders. Furnish not the haters of vital piety, with a plausible pretext for that cutting question, What do ye, more than others? Show, that Divine truth, when rightly known and embraced, changes the manners and temper, and transforms lions into lambs, and serpents into doves. Act, in every instance, under the guidance of the Spirit. Conduct your secular affairs with that spiritual frame which becomes the disciples of the holy Jesus. Manifest, that you are animated by other and nobler principles than the bulk of mankind. Abound in those fruits of the Spirit, meekness, patience, forgiveness of injuries, self-denial, integrity, and mercy. Let your conversation thus vindicate the usefulness and efficacy of gospel ordinances, and of gospel motives. Let the world see, that the power which raised Jesus from the dead, hath raised you to a heavenly and divine life; and that you now live joyfully, honourably, and usefully, through Christ living in you. Justify your Christianity, by discovering a spirit, that, in the utmost perplexity, against hope believes in hope; that sinks not in adversity; that is not immoderately elated by prosperity; and that hath learned, in every state wherein Providence hath placed you, therewith to be content.

DIS-

T
mea
prov
gosp
stum
tent
even
tion,
high
vince
from
en is
even
Son
a Pet
lead
Their

* M
angels,
the apo
Their r
conclusi

DISCOURSE XII.

JESUS SEEN OF ANGELS.

I TIMOTHY iii. 16.

GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH, JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT,
SEEN OF ANGELS *.

THE small number, the low abilities, and the mean rank, of those who glory in the cross of Christ, prove to many a fatal stumbling block against the gospel. I would this day attempt to remove that stumbling block. I am to proclaim a truth less attended to, believed and improved, than it ought: even, that the admirers of the gospel scheme of salvation, are more in number, of superior abilities, and higher in honour, than those who despise it. To convince you of this, I must indeed turn your thoughts from what is seen, to what is unseen. But, how often is that necessary to rectify sentiments and conduct, even in ordinary life?

Some of you may remember, my considering from 1 Pet. iii. 12., those properties of the angels, which lead them to pry into the mystery of redemption. Their wisdom with pleasure contemplates what is excellent:

C c

* Mosheim, and other able critics, think, that the word rendered *angels*, should rather have been translated *messengers*; and refers to the apostles, as witnesses of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Their reasonings, however, though ingenious, in my opinion are not conclusive. But I see no occasion for entering into that question.

cellent : their love to God delights in what advances his glory. Their benevolence is gratified by the happiness of mankind ; and offices are assigned them, for the benefit of the redeemed, in which their active spirits love to be employed. I shall, at this time, place the subject in a different point of view, and omit, or briefly hint, many particulars, then more fully discussed.

I. For explaining this subject, I observe,

(1.) Angels were witnesses of the most important events which concerned the Redeemer. When man, seduced by Satan, fell from his original happiness and integrity, may we not conclude, that the heavenly hosts were informed of the first promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head ; and that, at least, some dark discoveries were vouchsafed to them of that amazing plan, by Him, who, in the fulness of time, visited and redeemed our fallen race ? Under the Patriarchal and Mosaical dispensations, the Son of God, as a prelude of his future incarnation, often appeared in human shape, and was attended, on these occasions, by created angels. At the plains of Mamre, three angels appeared to Abraham, in the form of men. The two who left him, and came to Sodom at even, were created angels. But the third, with whom, after their departure, Abraham continued to talk, is termed Jehovah, and the Judge of the whole earth ^a. When the Lord, the angel of the covenant, descended on Mount Sinai, and spoke with Moses, thousands of angels were his attendants ^b.—With louder shouts of triumph, they witnessed his resurrection.

^a Compare Gen. xviii. 2, 16, 22. ; xix. 1.

^b See Ex. xix. 18. ; Acts vii. 38.

farrection. They witnessed and accompanied his glorious ascension to heaven. They now behold and praise him in his exalted state; and, on a day yet future, they shall make up a part of his splendid retinue, when he comes again to judge the quick and the dead. Nor need it surprize us, that, in these majestic appearances, the hosts of heaven attended their Lord.—But, how different the scenes which they witnessed, when God was manifested in the flesh! The everlasting Father become an infant of days! He, whom the heavens, and heavens of heavens, cannot contain, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger; living a life of meanness, reproach, and persecution; and at last submitting to a painful, ignominious, and accursed death!—Nor did they only witness this outward abasement, and these bodily sufferings. They witnessed scenes of sorrow, into which the mortal eye could not penetrate. Men saw the Holy One, and the Just, nailed to a cross. But, angels also beheld his agony of soul in the garden, when inward anguish, not bodily torture, forced him to sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground. They beheld the powers of darkness, daring with their fiery darts to assault him, at whose majesty, even devils were wont to tremble. They beheld that God, who delights in holiness, and who doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, pleased to bruise his Holy One, and to put him to grief, and treating one who had never sinned, as if he had been the worst of sinners. They beheld the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, amazed, very heavy, yea, exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Well might the earth tremble, the sun veil himself in darkness, and

the hosts of heaven stand astonished, at so marvellous a sight.

(2.) The angels, who beheld this amazing scene, were honoured to minister to Jesus in these his sufferings. Thus, after our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, we read, Matth. iv. 11., "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels come and minister unto him." Probably they ministered food to supply his necessities, as they had before done to supply the necessities of Israel in the wilderness; on which account, manna is termed angels food, Psal. lxxviii. 25., because angels were employed as instruments in bringing it to Israel. And, when he prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done:" we are told, Luke xxii. 43., "There appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." What a dignity conferred on the highest created angel, to be employed in such an office! But, what a stoop in Him, by whom all things were created and made, to receive it even from an angel's hand! On both occasions, with what wonder, with what reverence, with what devotion, with what warmth of affection, would those holy spirits approach the illustrious sufferer! "All our strength, all our comfort, is derived from thee; and, dost thou need, dost thou submit, to be comforted and strengthened by us? All things come of thee, and it is of thine own, we are honoured to give thee. Yet, our honour tempts us not to pride. The view of thy abasement, secures and increases our humility."

(3.) Angels behold and pry into the grand designs, for which Infinite Wisdom ordained all this scene of condescension and suffering. They not only saw God
manifest

manifest in the flesh, but they saw the purposes for which he was thus manifest, for which he lived, for which he died. They beheld him appearing to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in an everlasting righteousness, and to deliver from the snare of the devil, those who were led captive by him at his will. They admire, they adore, the infinite wisdom that contrived the amazing plan. They admire, they adore Him, who came in the name of the Lord to execute it. If, when the foundations of the earth were laid, these morning stars sung together, and all these sons of God shouted for joy; well might they raise their notes higher, when, by the incarnation of the Second Person of the trinity, they saw a foundation laid for a new and nobler creation. In the first creation, God from nothing produced an universe. But here, happiness is produced from misery, and glory from shame. Here, pardon is created to the guilty; peace to the wounded in spirit; and to the slave of Satan, the glorious liberty of God's children. And, while men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, had been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: even unto principalities and powers in the heavenly places, is made known, by those wondrous transactions for the redemption of the church, the manifold wisdom of God ^c. Need we, after this, inquire, why the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that hath followed, the gospel preached, and the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to render it effectual, are things which angels desire to look into ^d? Though much they know, they desire still to know more, and never grow weary of

C c 3

gazing

^c Eph. iii. 9, 10.^d 1 Pet. i. 11, 12.

gazing on this delightful object. This is represented, Ex. xxv. 20., by the two cherubims, with their faces towards the mercy-seat. The mercy-seat, which covered the ark wherein lay the book of the law, was a type of Jesus, whom God hath set forth as the true mercy-seat, and who covers and shelters his people from the curse of the law, having become a curse for them. Upon Him the eyes of angels are fixed. In Him they at once see, righteousness and judgement the habitations of God's throne, and mercy and truth going before his face. They admire the suitableness of the Redeemer's person, for accomplishing his work. The vail of flesh hid not from them the majesty of the God. In their eyes, he is glorious in his apparel, though his garments are dyed with blood. They discern a dignity in his sufferings, a lustre in his abasement; seeing, for purposes infinitely important, he suffered, and was abased. Hence, when the Father bringeth in the First Begotten into the world, he saith, "Let all the angels of God worship him^e;" and, when the angel revealed to the shepherds the birth of the Saviour, suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men^f." If now they surround the throne of the exalted Redeemer, and honour him, even as they honour the Father; what he did and suffered for mankind in his humbled state, is one chief foundation of their praise. "I beheld," says the disciple who lay in Christ's bosom, "and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand,"

^e Heb. i. 6.^f Luke ii. 8—14.^g Rev. v. 11, 12.

“ stand, and thousands of thousands ; saying with a
 “ loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to
 “ receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength,
 “ and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

(4.) While beholding the love, which prompted the Son of God thus to condescend, and thus to suffer : angels learn to love, and willingly to attend upon, and minister to the meanest of those, whom the Lord of angels loved, and for whose salvation he stooped so low. When God drove out Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, he placed at the east of it cherubims, and a flaming sword turning every way, to keep the way of the tree of life ^h. Angels could not be friends to those, to whom God was an enemy. But, Jesus having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him it pleased the Father to reconcile all things unto himself, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven ⁱ. We have a beautiful emblem of this in Jacob's dream : “ i He dreamed, and behold a ladder
 “ set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and
 “ descending upon it.” Jesus, who as man is the fruit of the earth, though as God higher than the heavens, is the great medium of friendly intercourse between angels and men. Angels rejoice to be instruments, as in advancing the glory of the Redeemer, so also in promoting the prosperity of the redeemed. What they do to the least of these his brethren, they know he accounts as done to himself. Angels rejoice in the graces and good works of true Christians. Hence, Paul recommends even external marks of reverence, when we attend ordinances, because of the
 C c 4 angels ;

^h Gen. iii. 24.

ⁱ Col. i. 20.

Gen. xxviii. 12.

angels ^k; because they witness our conduct in religious assemblies ^l, and are grieved with every thing indecent, and much more with every thing hypocritical or profane. But, what joy is felt by those benevolent spirits, over one sinner that repenteth ^m! Every one added to the triumphs of sovereign grace, is also added to their delightful charge. For “are they not “all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them “who shall be heirs of salvation?” The great and mighty of the earth may plot their destruction. But, there are in heaven, principalities and powers ready to protect them. Because, O Christian, thou hast made the Lord thy refuge, even the Most High thy habitation, he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone ⁿ. Whether this promise was originally made to Joshua, or to the Captain of Salvation, of whom he was a type, it surely belongs to all who fight under the banners of Jesus. Upon Jesus, angels attend, for his own sake: upon them, for his sake, and by his direction and command. Their Maker is the friend, yea the husband of believers: and respect and affection to him, lead them to love, to honour, and to delight in performing offices of kindness, to persons so nearly related to him, and so precious in his sight. We are come, even in a present life, to an innumerable company of angels ^p. We form one society, we have fellowship with them, share in their friendship, and reap advantages from their labours of love. These services are not the less real or important, because we discern not how they are performed. Horses and chariots of fire

^k 1 Cor. xi. 10.^l 1 Tim. v. 21.^m Luke xv. 10.ⁿ Heb. i. 14.^p Psalm xci. 9, 11, 12. ^p Heb. xii. 22.

fire were round about Elisha, though the servant of that man of God saw them not, till the Lord miraculously opened his eyes ⁹. Never was earthly prince so magnificently attended, and so strongly guarded, as those who, being washed from their sins in the blood of the Lamb, are made kings and priests unto God and the Father. Hearken, O blinded world, to the words of the faithful and true witness. “¹ Take heed, “ that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say “ unto you, that in heaven their angels do always be- “ hold the face of my Father, which is in heaven.” God’s angels are also their angels. The little child just beginning to lisp out the praises of God, the brother of low degree, he who hath not where to lay his head, he whom men despise; yet, if he has grace, though small as a grain of mustard seed, may say, “ My angels behold the face of my heavenly Father. “ Lover and friend may be removed far from me, “ and my acquaintance into darkness. Mighty and “ malicious foes may encompass me about as bees. “ But, I have friends who can never die. Angels, “ who excel in strength, are commissioned to accom- “ pany and defend me, through all the dangers of “ this my pilgrimage state; or to carry my departed “ spirit, as they did that of poor Lazarus, to Abra- “ ham’s bosom. Grieve not, O my soul, by hearken- “ ing to the solicitations of sin, those holy and bene- “ volent spirits. Let Michael and his angels, let not “ the dragon and his angels prevail.” And here, permit me to hint, that though the Holy Ghost alone can renew and sanctify the heart, yet good spirits may have as much access to our minds as evil ones. If the last present to the imagination objects that tend to inflame

⁹ 2 Kings vi. 17.¹ Matth. xviii. 10.

inflammate corrupt appetites : why should it be thought a thing incredible, that the first should suggest sentiments and reflexions, tending, through the blessing of God, to excite pious affections and resolutions, in ourselves or in others. They are wise, powerful, active spirits : and, if it is no blemish in God's government, that devils are permitted to tempt to wickedness, surely it cannot be deemed unworthy of God, to employ good spirits in suggesting what is profitable. I see not upon what principles this can be denied, unless we absurdly imagine, that evil spirits, by rebelling against God, acquired new powers and faculties, easier access to the human mind, or greater skill in influencing it. If good spirits are employed to minister to the heirs of salvation, it is natural to think, that spiritual services, for which their noble powers and holy dispositions so signally qualify them, are one part of their ministry. They are at least equally desirous, that men should be holy and blessed ; as evil spirits are, that men should remain wicked and miserable. Why then should we suppose their activity less in promoting, than that of evil spirits in obstructing, the progress of truth and virtue ? Imagine not, that this view of things in any degree diminishes our obligations to God's providence or grace. God remains the author of every good and perfect gift, when he employs our fellow mortals in conveying temporal or spiritual benefits. Shall then the instrumentality of angels, who, in all their services, do God's commandment, and hearken to the voice of his word, diminish obligations to him, without whom the hosts of heaven neither could nor would help ? God can do all things by the word of his power. Yet, his wisdom and goodness appear, in the union, harmony, affection, and sympathetic

thetic joy, which he diffuses through creatures of the same or various orders, by the services one performs and another receives.

(5.) Angels, who saw God manifest in the flesh, were the first publishers to man, of some of the most important events which they witnessed. An angel acquainted Daniel, that the Messiah should be cut off, though not for himself. ^s An angel was the first publisher of the Saviour's birth. " ^t There were in the country, " shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over " their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the " Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord " shone round about them ; and they were sore afraid. " And the angel said unto them, Fear not : for, be- " hold, I bring to you good tidings of great joy, " which shall be to all people. For unto you is born " this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is " Christ the Lord." If the audience was mean, the preacher was honourable. An angel of the Lord, whose countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, was the first who proclaimed the joyful event that Christ was risen. " ^u He said unto " the women, Fear not ye ; for I know that ye seek " Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here : for " he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where " the Lord lay." Angels assured the apostles, that their Lord was ascended to heaven, and would descend from it again to judge the world. " ^v While they " looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, be- " hold, two men stood by them in white apparel ; " which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye " gazing up into heaven ? This same Jesus, which is " taken

^s Dan. ix. 20—26.

^t Luke ii. 8—12.

^u Matth. xxviii. 3—7.

^v Acts i. 10, 11.

“ taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in
 “ like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven.”
 —Despise not those mysteries, which angels first preached. Despise not that office, in which angels were first employed. If, instead of those glorious spirits, men, formed like thyself out of the clay, are now entrusted with these treasures, it is wisely and graciously ordered, that their terror make thee not afraid. Let not novices in years, in knowledge, or in Christian experience, rashly conclude, that they are called and qualified for teaching those great things of God, of which angels were the first teachers. And let others beware of choosing such novices for their spiritual guides.

And, now, to conclude with a few practical reflections.

(1.) How shocking the folly and ingratitude of many! Angels desire to look into the mysteries of grace: and men, more nearly concerned in them, esteem it a disparagement to bestow upon them one serious thought. They shut their eyes, despise and scoff; while angels gaze, and wonder and adore. Thus absurd is the behaviour of many, who would pass for standards of wise conduct and deep penetration. They peruse with patience, perhaps with rapture, a genteel, though trifling play or romance. The mystery of godliness has no form nor comeliness to attract their attention. When truths are explained, which angels esteem the noblest entertainment: their hearts say, what a weariness is it? To their depraved appetite, the husks that swine do eat, the empty vanities of time and sense, have a more exquisite relish than angels food. Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what taste, what wisdom is in them? Foolish and wicked,
 they

they deign not to fix their eye upon Him, who is the study and the delight of angels. Indeed, this need not surprise. Angels are angels. Men are men, blind to, and hence little concerned about the glory of God, or their own duty and true happiness. Yet, what need not amaze, should deeply affect. It is not those only, immersed in gross sensual pollutions, whom we have cause to lament. Men, who spend their time more laudably in studying the works of nature, are often content with ignorance, or superficial knowledge, of God manifest in the flesh. Soon shall the heavens pass away with a great noise, the elements melt with fervent heat, the earth and all the things in it be burnt up. The subject of the naturalist's researches shall be no more found. That mystery of God, even the Father, and of Christ, which now is as nothing with many, shall fill up eternity, and to the blessed be all in all. It is not by a transient glance of this glory of the Lord; it is by gazing upon it, as they who through a glass steadily behold distant objects, that men are changed more and more into the image of the Lord, from glory to glory.

(2.) Imitate angels.—The sufferings and glory of the Redeemer, are their favourite meditation. Let them also be yours. Count all things loss and dung, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. The Father calls you. “^w Behold my Servant, whom I uphold; mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth.” “^x Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, and behold Zion's King, with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him, in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.” The Saviour himself calls you. He says, “^y Behold me, behold me,
“ unto

^w Is. xlii. 1.^x Song, iii. 11.^y Is. lxi. 1.; xlv. 22.

“ unto a nation that was not called by his name.
 “ Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the
 “ earth; for I am God, and there is none else.”
 The diseased, dangerous state of your souls, to which
 nothing, save a sight of Christ, can afford health and
 safety, demands your speedy compliance with the call.
² For, as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness:
 even so, was the Son of man lifted up; that who-
 ever, seeing his ability and willingness to save, believ-
 eth on Him, might not perish, but have everlasting
 life.—Imitate angels, in ministering to Christ.
 Though you cannot minister to his person, you may
 minister to the members of his mystical body. Esteem
 not thyself too great or good to serve even the mean-
 est of those, whom angels disdain not to serve. They
 deem it no disgrace to attend upon men, whose na-
 ture, the incarnation of the Son of God hath dignified
 and ennobled. To protect, to relieve, to comfort a
 Christian, is their employment, and their joy. It is
 diabolical pride, or criminal coldness of heart, which
 thinks it dishonourable or unpleasant, for such pur-
 poses, to stoop to the lowest offices. O, let not the
 little short-lived distinctions of rank and fortune, puff
 thee up with arrogance and vanity, and make thee
 forget the interest of thy Christian brother!—Imi-
 tate angels, in proclaiming to others the glories of the
 Redeemer. I mean not, that private Christians should
 renounce their respective callings, and commence pub-
 lic teachers: that they should cast pearls before swine,
 by introducing religious conversation, when it is more
 likely to hurt, than to profit: or that they should ob-
 trude upon others their own peculiar sentiments of
 difficult

² Jo. iii. 14, 15.

difficult and disputable questions. Without incurring such blame, Christians may find favourable opportunities for exercising their spiritual priesthood, and holding forth the word of life. When such opportunities present themselves, improve them carefully. Be not ashamed of Christ's words and ways, in this adulterous and perverse generation. Angels condescended to preach, not only to the apostles of Christ, and to the women weeping at his sepulchre, but also to the shepherds of Bethlehem. Let your lips feed many. As stars, or rather as angels, point out to your fellow sinners the way to Jesus.—Imitate angels in love to God, and the Redeemer. “Why should they love God and Jesus, more than I do? For me he died, not for them. God never forgave them one offence: but, through the blood of Jesus, he has forgiven me ten thousand.”

(3.) Rejoice, that he, who was seen of angels, was manifest in the flesh. Triumph, O Christian, in that name, Immanuel, God with us. In creation, man was made a little lower than the angels. In redemption, the Son of God, by assuming our nature, has done infinitely greater honour to us, than to them. “^a For, verily, he took not on him the nature of angels, but took on him the seed of Abraham.” God in our nature, our friend, our kinsman, our brother, is worshipped by angels. “^b For, when God bringeth in the First Begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him.” He, to whom angels ministered in his humbled suffering state, came not to be ministered unto by men, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. The Head of angels, is the Husband of the church.

Angels

^a Heb. ii. 16.

^b Heb. i. 6.

Angels beheld his sufferings and glory. He suffered, and entered into glory, for guilty, polluted man. Angels sing ^c, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." The ransomed among men join in the song, and add to it, "For thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

(4.) Ask your hearts, Have we ever seen the Lord? You have heard of him with the hearing of the ear. Have you, by the eye of faith, so seen him, as to abhor yourselves, and repent in dust and ashes? Doth beholding his glory remove prejudice against him, captivate your hearts, and transform you to his image? Having, in ordinances, seen him darkly, and as through a glass: do you long for the blessed day, when, as the angels do, ye shall see him face to face? Then, the glories of Immanuel shall shine far more brightly than they did on mount Tabor; and your ravished souls shall cry out, "Lo, this is He, who was wounded for our iniquities, and bruised for our transgressions; He, who was preached to us in the gospel; He, in whom we believed: but, how little did we see, how little did we know, either of his majesty, or of his grace! It was a true and a good report we heard of him in a distant land: but, lo! the one half was not told us."——In the mean time, until the day dawn, and the shadows fly away, you who have seen, you who have known, follow on to see, and to know the Lord. Frequent the places where he is wont to be seen. Say to the Saviour ^d, "Tell me, O Thou, whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flocks to ly down at noon: for, why should I be as one
" that

^c Rev. v. 12. 9.

^d Song, i. 7,

“ that turneth aside by the flocks of thy compa-
“ nions ? ” Plead for larger measures of the spirit
of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ,
that ye may comprehend what is the height, and
depth, and length, and breadth, and know the love
of Christ, that passeth knowledge, that ye may be fil-
led with all the fulness of God.

D d

DIS.

DISCOURSE XIII*.

JESUS PREACHED UNTO THE GENTILES.

I TIMOTHY iii. 16.

GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH, JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT,
SEEN OF ANGELS, PREACHED UNTO THE GENTILES.

WE were lately considering Jesus as seen of angels, and receiving the cheerful homage of those nobles of heaven. It was not however intended, that they should be the only witnesses to the history of an incarnate God. The joyful tidings, that Christ came in the name of the Father to save us, must be proclaimed in every corner of the habitable earth. And men of all kindreds, nations and languages, must repair to the Saviour, for a portion in the inestimable blessings of his purchase. The salvation acquired by the blood of the Son of God, must be applied by his word and spirit. Or, in the words of my text, Christ must be preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world. Angels desire to look into, not only the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that hath followed, but the gospel preached, and the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to render it effectual. And surely,

a

* This and the following discourse were hastily composed; are sketches, rather than sermons; and contain observations more fully illustrated by the Author in other discourses. He has little prospect of leisure to supply their defects: and therefore, in compliance with many solicitations to publish all his sermons on this text, imperfect as they are, presents them to the public.

a subject so noble and interesting, merits the solemn attention of the sons of men.

What I intend from these words, is to represent in what manner Christ was preached to the Gentiles, and in what respects this event was a mystery.

I. I am to represent in what manner Christ was preached to the Gentiles. And,

(1.) The great truths which relate to Christ, were declared and explained to them. Other truths were published to heathens, to make way for the gospel: such as, the being, perfections, and providence of God; our obligations to love and serve him, and to live sober, righteous and useful lives; our violation of these obligations; and the danger incurred by that violation.—Other truths were also to be inculcated on converts to Christianity, as we find from the epistles. But they were preached in their reference to Christ, and as connected with him, not in the strain of a heathen philosopher, or mere moralist. If the majesty of God was published, it was to exalt the riches of his grace and condescension in Christ. If the happiness of believers was represented, Christ was pointed out as the purchaser and bestower of all that happiness. If the human and social virtues were recommended, it was on considerations founded on the scheme of salvation through Christ. “Flee fornication. What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s ^a.” “Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us. Huf-

D d 2

“bands,

^a 1 Cor. vi. 18—20.

“bands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ^b.” “What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, you take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously ^c.” Nay, our natural depravity, and the doctrine that free grace alone hath made a difference between us and the vilest of men, is improved as an argument against evil speaking ^d.

Christ, therefore, was the chief, though not the only subject of the apostles sermons; and every thing else was preached in reference to him. What we are told of Paul's sermons at Corinth and Rome, is equally true of the sermons of the rest of the apostles. Wherever they ministered, they determined to make nothing known in comparison of Christ and him crucified ^e. They preached the kingdom of God, or gospel dispensation, and taught those things which concern the Lord Jesus ^f.

What were the things concerning Christ, which they taught, it is impossible to say in one sermon. To lead you to the knowledge of them, in all our sermons, is, or ought to be, our chief business. Let me just hint a few particulars.

The undertaking of Christ in the covenant of redemption, and the promises then made him by the Father:

^b Eph. v. 2, 22.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 20—23.

^d Tit. iii. 2—7.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^f Acts xxviii. 31.

Father : His personal glory, both as the equal and fellow of the Almighty, and as anointed in his human nature with the Holy Ghost and with power : His fitness as God-man for redeeming lost mankind : His incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension to heaven, the glory with which he is now invested, and the character of universal judge, in which he will one day appear : His glory as the true light of the world, the accomplisher of the law for righteousness to every one who believeth, the sacrifice for our sins, our prevailing advocate, our king and ruler, the channel through which all divine influence is imparted to us, and the perfect pattern of every thing good and excellent : His ability and willingness to save the very chief of sinners : The privileges he hath purchased for his people : The returns of gratitude and obedience, due for these privileges : The means of obtaining an actual interest in all that he hath done and suffered : And the glory of the divine perfections shining in him, and in the plan of redemption through him :—These are themes, which can never be exhausted. In them, is boundless room for thought to expatiate, and for the most exalted genius to entertain itself with pleasure and advantage. The highest angels esteem the Redeemer infinitely worthy of their attention and praise. And shall not we, who have less clear and extensive views of God, under other considerations of Him, than they have, and who are more nearly related to Christ, and need him more than they do, reckon it our honour to proclaim to our fellow sinners, his majesty and his love ? Shall there be less of Christ in the sermons of a Christian minister, than in the writings of a Jewish prince or prophet ? Shall we call ourselves teachers of Chris-

tianity, and yet omit subjects which constitute its peculiar beauty and glory? Is he a faithful embassador of Christ, who seldom or never speaks in his favour? We must not indeed be wise above what is written, and attempt to explain what God hath kept secret, and what in this imperfect state we cannot comprehend. Still, however, something of those glorious mysteries may be understood; otherwise they could not promote the exercise of grace and the practice of duty; and would not merit the name of mysteries of godliness, or doctrines according to godliness. A doctrine which we in no degree understand, like a sound which conveys no idea or sentiment, can have no influence on the will or affections.

(2.) The apostles laid before their hearers sufficient evidence of the truths concerning Christ, in which they were instructed. Thus, Paul confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that Jesus is very Christ ^f. At a synagogue in Thessalonica, as his manner was, he went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that Jesus is the Christ ^g. Apollos mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was Christ ^h. The epistles, not content with asserting the doctrines of Christianity, demonstrate them from facts, from the principles of natural religion, or from the prophecies of the Old Testament. Ministers are unfit for their office, who are not able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convince gainayers ⁱ. If private Christians, surely much more teachers of Christianity,

^f Acts ix. 22.

^g Acts xvii. 2, 3.

^h Acts xviii. 28.

ⁱ Tit. i. 9.

Christianity, should contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ^j: not by giving bad names or bad usage to such who oppose it, but by strong and unanswerable arguments in support of truth, and satisfying replies to the plausible objections made against it. If some fix upon this, the odious charge of preaching controversy; permit me to remind them, that Jesus and his apostles were in this sense preachers of controversy, and that every preacher must be so, who leads his hearers to understand the grounds of faith.

(3.) The apostles invited and commanded their hearers to believe on Christ, to receive him, and to rest on him alone for salvation. Christ, and the blessings of his purchase, were freely offered to all, and all were invited and enjoined to accept them. Our Lord's commission to his disciples, is in these terms: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature ^k." Now, the gospel is properly the glad tidings that Jesus is able and willing to save, and that even the chief of sinners are warranted to come to him for salvation. It was our Lord's charge to his apostles, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem ^l." Peter calls on his hearers, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" and telleth them, "Unto you first, God having raised up his son Jesus, hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities ^m." This cannot mean, that all of them should be converted; for we are immediately told, that many of them which heard the word, believed ⁿ; which surely implies, that all were not believ-

D d 4

ers.

^j Jude 3.

^k Mark xvi. 15.

^l Luke xxiv. 47-

^m Acts iii. 19, 26.

ⁿ Acts iv. 4.

ers. Peter therefore only means, that Christ was offered to every one of his hearers, and that all of them were warranted to apply to him for the blessings of his spirit and grace. Paul thus addresses his hearers at Antioch in Pisidia : “ To you is the word of salvation sent. Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” And yet, at the same time, he cautions them against despising, and wondering, and perishing ; and some, to whom he thus published the word of God, put it far from them °. This was agreeable to the method of the Old Testament prophets, who abound in calls and invitations to sinners to secure a portion in saving blessings. “ Wisdom crieth without ; she uttereth her voice in the streets ; saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge ? Turn you at my reproof : behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you P.” “ Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth ; for I am God, and there is none else Q.” “ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him
“ return

° Acts xiii. 26, 38, 41, 45, 46.

P Prov. i. 20, 22, 23.

Q Isa. xlv. 22.

“ return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will abundantly “ pardon ^r. ” This was the method of Christ himself. “ In the last day, that great day of the feast, “ Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, “ let him come unto me, and drink ^s. ” And on another occasion—“ Come unto me, all ye that labour, “ and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ^t. ” And again—“ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the “ wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted “ up ; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life ^u. ” This surely is a plain declaration, that as every Israelite, stung with the fiery serpents, had a right to look to the brazen serpent for outward healing ; so, every sinner, to whom the gospel is preached, hath a right to look to Christ for spiritual health. Hence, in the parable of the marriage supper, even those are represented as bidden, who made excuse, and thus provoked the Lord to say to his servants, that none of them should taste of his supper ^v. .

Unto the Gentiles was Christ thus preached, as well as to the Jews, to whom the calls of the gospel were first directed : to unbelievers, for their conversion, of which we have many instances in the Acts of the Apostles ; and to those who had received Christ Jesus the Lord, that they might walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith ^w. Many are of opinion, that there is no need of preaching Christ, save to infidels ; that the bulk of professed Christians know what is sufficient of the mysteries of religion ; and that, therefore, morality is the only

^r Isa. lv. 1, 2, 6, 7.^s Jo. vii. 37.^t Matth. xi. 28.^u Jo. iii. 14, 15.^v Luke xiv. 16—24.^w Col. ii. 6, 7.

only proper subject of sermons to them. But, the epistles directed to the sanctified in Jesus, evidence that this was not the sentiment of the apostles. They accounted growing in the knowledge of Christ, the best mean of growing in grace ^x; and they directed those set apart to the ministry, to affirm constantly, justification by free grace, that they which believe in God might be careful to maintain good works ^y. They neglected not, therefore, to put their converts in remembrance of those things, though they knew them, and were established in the present truth. Many of their epistles set out with a large explication and defence of the scheme of Divine wisdom and grace in man's redemption through Christ; and then proceed to improve these doctrines, for exciting men to holiness and new obedience. The edification and comfort of sincere Christians, is much promoted, by frequent displays of what Christ is in himself, what he is to them, and hath done and suffered in their room; what blessings he hath purchased for them, and what returns of gratitude and obedience he expects and demands.

II. I am next to show, in what respect Christ preached to the Gentiles is a mystery.

It was mysterious, that, for a long period, God suffered them to walk in their own ways; giving his statutes unto Jacob, and his testimonies unto Israel, while he dealt not so with other nations. This however was a mystery of wisdom. The time of the coming of Christ, and of the preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, was the fulness of time, the best and fittest for these purposes; purposes, indeed, highly important to mankind, but no way necessary for vindicating the justice of God's dispensations to the heathen,

^x 2 Pet. iii. 18,

^y Tit. iii. 8,

then. They had sinned against nature's light. When they knew God, or might have known him, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful. They deserved not, therefore, the light of revelation, having imprisoned in unrighteousness the truths reason taught them.

Still, however, it remains a mystery, that to the Gentiles Christ was preached, when they were at the very worst. Search the inspired epistles, and tell me, was Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, or Crete, celebrated for sobriety, chastity, justice, benevolence, and other human and social virtues, when the apostles were sent to publish in their ears the religion of Jesus? Did they generally resemble a Socrates, an Aristides, a Fabricius, a Camillus? Alas! wisdom and goodness were far from them. Many of them were the most abandoned profligates, fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, drunkards, revilers, extortioners. Consult impartially the history of the Roman empire in the apostolic age, and perhaps you will find, that no period was ever sunk deeper in cruelty, treachery, and the most unnatural pollutions, or was better entitled to be accounted the Iron Age. Philosophy, learning, and eloquence, indeed flourished, at least in the beginning of that period. Virtue was explained, and recommended in an ingenious and entertaining manner, by some of the finest pens; though, unfortunately, the lives of some, who wrote well, were little of a piece with their noble sentiments. Curious inquiries were made into the foundation of morals: but, what many talked and disputed about, few practised. The temperance, integrity, public spirit, and contempt of riches and pleasures, for which the Romans had been so illustrious before the destruction

destruction of Carthage, were now succeeded, at Rome, and throughout the empire, by a selfish, interested spirit, unbridled licentiousness, venality and corruption, insolence to inferiors, and abject flattery of those in power. Yet, when ages, comparatively virtuous, were left to sit in darkness; on this abandoned age, the light of the gospel first shined.

What can we say to these things? How unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out! Perhaps, in the preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, as in the conversion of their great apostle, God was willing to shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe. Perhaps, he meant to exhibit a striking evidence, that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. When offers of salvation were made, in the amplest manner, to a generation so enlightened, and yet so profligate: does not this manifest, that all, however vile and unworthy, are welcome to the Saviour?

The confirmation of Christianity might be another end of this mysterious dispensation. The gospel was intended to subdue sinners to Christ. God, therefore, first sends it on that design, in an age where it was like to meet with the greatest opposition, that its amazing conquests might manifest its Divine original.

And this leads me to observe, that the effects of the preaching of Christ to the Gentiles, were mysterious and amazing. When the men of Cyprus and Cyrene spoke to the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus, the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord^z. And, while Peter was telling Cornelius, and those assembled with him,

^z Acts xi. 20, 21.

him, that, through Christ's name, whosoever believed on him should receive remission of sins; the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word ^a. Thus, the Gentiles received the Spirit by the hearing of faith ^b; and the gospel proved to them the ministration of the Spirit, and of life ^c. No wonder that Paul, deeply impressed with those happy effects of a preached gospel, entertained so warm and grateful a sense of the honour done him, in employing him in that office, and in rendering his labours successful. "To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unfearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ ^d." "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek ^e." "Now, thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the favour of his knowledge by us in every place ^f." It was this, too, that led him to declare, wherever Christ was preached, even from motives blameworthy, herein he did rejoice, yea, and would rejoice ^g.

Every one who sees his sins in a just light, will acknowledge it a mystery of free unmerited goodness, that to him, in particular, Christ is preached. God might have sent messengers of wrath, to have dragged his rebellious subjects to endless destruction. But, lo!

our

^a Acts x. 43, 44.

^b Gal. iii. 2.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 6—8.

^d Eph. iii. 8, 9.

^e Rom. i. 16.

^f 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^g Phil. i. 18.

our justly offended Sovereign, who, with infinite ease, could frown us into misery, sends us an embassy of peace. "We," says Paul in the name of all who preach the gospel, "are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God^h." And, "How beautiful upon the mountains, are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reignethⁱ!" What thanks do we owe to God, for such merciful treatment! To millions of insolent and ungrateful offenders, an indemnity is proclaimed, and not one is excepted in it, who does not deprive himself of it, by neglecting to plead it. The gospel is indeed our glory and crown: and to those who hear this joyful sound, we may well apply the words of Moses, "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for^j?"

But, how melancholy is it, that though in our land Christ is preached to the Gentiles, many remain ignorant of him; and though, for the time, they might have been teachers of others, need that one teach them again what be the first principles of the oracles of God^k! They know not, neither will they understand. Though light is come into the world, they love darkness rather than light^l. Some refuse a hearing to the ambassadors of Christ, while others pour contempt on their embassy, not attending to it, and hearing it as if they heard it not. May not God be justly provoked to deprive those of the precious light of the gospel,

^h 2 Cor. v. 20.

ⁱ If. lii. 7.

^j Deut. iv. 7.

^k Heb. v. 22.

^l Jo. iii. 19.

gospel, who thus undervalue it? If they persist in their contempt, blackness of darkness shall be their portion hereafter. It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for them; every discovery of Christ, against which they have shut their eyes, every offer of salvation through him, to which they have turned a deaf ear, adding a new sting to their anguish and remorse. Upon the entertainment given a preached gospel, depends endless happiness or woe. Happy will it be for thee, who hearkenest to its calls, that ever thou heardst of Christ. But thou who rejectest them, art lost and undone. O soul, empty of every thing good! all the treasures of mercy and grace, which can enrich thee in time and through eternity, are at Christ's disposal, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. If thou repair to him for supply, he will cause thee to inherit substance, and fill all thy treasures. If thou wilt not, thou must remain poor and wretched, and perish and pine away in thine iniquities. Jesus, who stands in no need of thee, tenderly and affectionately entreats thee to come to him. And wilt thou, who standest in infinite need of him, refuse to be entreated? For thy sake, he veiled the glories of his divinity, and submitted first to a sorrowful life, and then to a painful, shameful, and accursed death. And wilt not thou, for thine own sake, cheerfully comply with his kind invitations? He comes to thee with a heart full of love, and with hands full of blessings. He comes not to bereave thee of any thing valuable, but to bestow upon thee grace and glory, and every good thing. Often, as the deaf adder, thou hast refused to hearken to the voice of this heavenly charmer, though charming never so wisely. Yet, he is loath that thou should perish; he remembers not
against

against thee all thy bypast obstinacy and ingratitude ; he still stands at thy door and knocks ; he waits that he may be gracious. How gladly would those purchase such offers, who now suffer the vengeance of eternal fire ! Ah, the madness of mankind, who will not guard against destruction, till destruction is inevitable ; and will not be serious, till the elements melt with fervent heat, and the earth, and all the works that are therein, are burnt up. The serious thoughtfulness, forced upon them by approaching misery, will no more profit them, than that of the old world profited them, when they perceived the warnings of Noah well-founded, by the flood coming and sweeping them away. Christ now addresseth the sons of men with a voice full of compassion, and often they refuse to hearken. The day cometh, when he will speak to such refusers in a voice of terror, to which, however unwilling, they must attend : “ These mine enemies, who would “ not that I should reign over them, take them, and slay “ them before me.” Consider well, O sinner, ere thou again refuse or delay to accept the Saviour, if thou canst bear the thoughts, that God should prove an inexorable Judge to condemn thee, and a consuming fire to destroy thee, in that awful day. Thy life is uncertain ; and, if death find thee a despiser of Jesus, thy damnation is sure.

DISCOURSE XIV.

JESUS BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD.

I TIMOTHY iii. 16.

GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH, JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT,
SEEN OF ANGELS, PREACHED UNTO THE GENTILES, BELIEVED
ON IN THE WORLD.

WE set before you, last opportunity, a mystery of free sovereign unmerited mercy, in God's visiting, with gospel light, an abandoned profligate generation. The words now read, present to your view a mystery of divine grace and power, working faith in multitudes, strongly prejudiced against the gospel, by false principles of religion, or by love of vice. The eloquence of the ablest advocate, even when pleading the justest cause, is often unable to persuade. The words of Christ are spirit and life. Divine energy accompanies divine truth. The Lord himself gives the word. The leaders of the hosts of hell are spoiled, and their captives delivered. Hence, the gospel of our salvation is termed the word of faith, because by it God works faith in his elect.

Without those powerful operations of the Spirit, the purchase of redemption, and the preaching of the gospel, would be in vain. It is not enough, that God has provided a robe of righteousness and garment of salvation: The shame of our nakedness must appear,

E e

if

if we refuse to put it on. It is not enough, that there is balm in Gilead and a physician there: His prescriptions, though of sovereign efficacy, leave all diseased, who will not use them. The Israelite, stung by the fiery serpents, was not relieved by the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness, if he did not look to it for healing. And the Gentiles must seek to the root of Jesse, who stands for an ensign of the people, if they would enter into his glorious rest.

But, was faith the only fruit of the preaching of the gospel? Was this the only mysterious effect of the doctrine of Christ? By no means. Never did any other cause produce so amazing, and so happy a revolution in the state of the moral world. The tempers of men were altered, and their lives reformed. The most vicious suddenly became the most virtuous of mankind. All old things are done away, all things become new. Instead of the briar, springs up the fir tree; and instead of the thorn, the myrtle tree. The wolf dwells with the lamb, and the leopard lies down with the kid. Yet, here, nothing of this is mentioned. We are only told, Christ was believed on in the world. But, indeed, when we are told this, we are told all. This was itself the greatest miracle, and with this all the other wonders I have mentioned were naturally and necessarily connected. It is faith, which infuseth supernatural life and vigour into every faculty of the soul, and inspires it with piety, benevolence, patience, meekness, temperance, fortitude. It is faith, which derives from Christ's fulness grace for grace. It is faith, which raises the affections from earth to heaven, and teaches to count all things loss and dung in comparison of Christ. No sooner did Zacheus receive the Saviour joyfully, than covetousness and oppression give way

way to justice and generosity. “ And Zacheus stood, “ and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of “ my goods I give to the poor ; and, if I have taken “ any thing from any man by false accusation, I re- “ store him fourfold ^a.” Faith is a conquering, tri- umphing grace ; strips pleasure, riches, and honour, of their alluring disguise ; abates the terror of temporal evils ; and animates, spite of the world’s frowns and flatteries, to hold fast integrity, and not let it go. The world can bribe with nothing so good as the favour of God, and threaten nothing so bad as his displeasure ; and therefore faith hearkens not to her deceitful soli- citations. Indeed, if his own interest was no how con- cerned, more generous motives would powerfully de- termine the believer, to abound in the fruits of righte- ousness, which are through Christ to the glory of God. Faith in Christ warms the heart with love and grati- tude ; and these, again, excite earnestness and activity, in whatever may promote the Redeemer’s honour. Faith, therefore, is mentioned in our text as the effect of a preached gospel, because faith engenders every other holy disposition, and is the radical grace, which it most of all concerns us to water and cherish.

I am naturally led from these words to consider, first, the import, and then the mysteriousness of Christ’s being believed on in the world.

I. The import of Christ being believed on in the world. Doubtless Paul here speaks of saving faith. What that is, we are told : “ ^b Whosoever believeth “ that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.” Faith is therefore a persuasion, that Jesus is the anointed Sa- viour of the world ; anointed to the offices of prophet,

E c 2

priest,

^a Luke x^x. 8.^b 1 Jo. v. 1.

priest, and king, that he may thus be made of God to his church, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. And this persuasion supposes conviction of our natural guilt, wretchedness, and inability to help ourselves. If we are not blind, guilty, defiled, enslaved to sin and Satan, we need not Christ to rescue us from blindness, guilt, pollution, and slavery: and to suppose him anointed to an unnecessary office, would be blasphemous. It is not, however, a persuasion of Christian doctrines, derived from the prejudices of education, or barely founded on external evidence, which is saving faith. His faith only is saving, whose persuasion of these, flows from spiritual discoveries of their importance, beauty, and glory; and whose soul, in consequence of it, betakes itself to Christ, as able and willing to save to the uttermost, and rests and relies upon him alone for salvation. The light in the understanding powerfully attracts to Christ, and captivates the heart, so that it can no longer flight or reject, but must open to the King of Glory. Hence, our Lord imputes to the ignorance and unbelief of the Samaritan woman, her not applying to him for heavenly blessings. “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”

Yet faith, though it views Jesus in all his mediatorial characters, in its first acts chiefly beholds him, as purchasing for us salvation by his meritorious sufferings: And hence, in many scriptures, the death and sacrifice of Christ is represented as the peculiar object of faith ^d.

II.

^c Jo. iv. 10.

^d Rom. iii. 25; iv. 24, 25; v. 9, 10; 2 Cor. v. 19—21.

II. I am now to consider the mysteriousness of Christ being believed on in the world.

It has been alleged, that laying much stress on faith, is teaching men an easy, and consequently a deceitful way to heaven. I might reply, that sincere faith teaches a more difficult religion, and a more difficult morality too, than many of the objectors think necessary. My subject, however, leads me to another answer. Faith itself is no easy attainment. It is a mystery, that any, even under the greatest external advantages, savingly believe. It was peculiarly a mystery, that such multitudes believed in the apostolic age.

(1.) It is a mystery, that, even under the most encouraging external circumstances, men savingly believe. Many are so immersed in business, or intoxicated with pleasure, that their attention is in vain courted to objects which strike not their senses. There is no persuading them seriously to seek the favour of God: there is no alarming them to dread his vengeance.—It is equally difficult to beat down the false refuges of the thoughtful and serious. Pride, foolish and blind, naturally dotes on her own imagined excellencies. Men would willingly be their own saviours, or at least come in for some share in the glory of their salvation. They fence themselves against the disagreeable discovery, that all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and that their prayers, resolutions, and endeavours, can no more alter the corrupt bias of their hearts, than the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots.—Even when a sinner sees himself unworthy and helpless; it is not easy to persuade him to look and hope for salvation, through the merit and strength of another. Indeed, little will

bring those, who think their disease slight and inconsiderable, to an imaginary trust in Christ for a cure; a trust, founded on persuasion, that their danger is small and insignificant, and their relief easy. They believe in Christ, because they believe they have little need of Christ. It is otherwise, when the Spirit shews unto men their iniquities and transgressions wherein they have exceeded, discovers the dreadful plagues of their hearts, and hides pride from them; so that they see God might justly inflict upon them the fierceness of his wrath. In this situation, nothing, save an exceeding greatness of Divine power, can convince sinners that there is help for them in Christ; that his obedience and sufferings are fully sufficient to atone for their guilt, and to purchase for them the heavenly glory; that his Spirit is able to subdue their corruptions, and to make them partakers of God's holiness; and that they are warranted, vile and unworthy as they are, to come to God, through Christ, for those blessings. It must be something beyond nature, which thus, against hope, believes in hope, and encourages itself in the Saviour, when every thing within is dark and discouraging. A humbled, self-condemning sinner, coming boldly to the throne of grace, for mercy to pardon, and grace to help, is indeed a wonderful spectacle. Faith is the gift of God; and no common inconsiderable gift.

(2) The multitude brought to believe in the apostolic age, is mysterious.

Though Jesus, during his personal ministry, spoke as never man spoke, testifying what he had seen and heard of the Father; yet no man received his testimony. He came to his own, and his own received him not. Though, in his own name, and by his

own

own power, he did among them such works as no other man did; yet he was despised and rejected of men. If the nation which eagerly looked for the coming of the Messias, gave him such treatment: was it probable that Gentiles, strangers to the covenants of promise, and not prepared for His gracious message by any former dispensation, would receive it more favourably? Yet, in fact, it was thus. God had foretold: "To Him, whom man despiseth; to Him, whom the nation abhorreth; to a servant of rulers: kings shall see and arise; princes also shall worship ^d." He, who had so little influence while he tabernacled on earth; now, when men see him no more, becomes the desire and delight of all nations. In about thirty years after Christ's resurrection, Christianity gains ground in most of the provinces of the Roman empire, and penetrates to Parthia, India, and other remote corners of the earth. Hundreds, nay, sometimes thousands, were converted by one sermon. The busy, the idle, the profligate, the civilized, the court, the camp, the schools of philosophy, all afforded trophies to the cross.—Nor did Christianity thus gain ground in a dark, illiterate, superstitious age. Never was there a period when imposture bid fairer to be detected, and every cunningly devised fable, or specious argument, to be thoroughly sifted.—The religion preached among the Gentiles, did not favour their prejudices, flatter their pride, or soothe their depraved appetites and passions. It called them to abhor, what, from their infancy, they had been taught to venerate; to embrace opinions, which the men of wisdom pronounced foolishness; to own one, as their Saviour and Lord, who hung on a tree; and

E e 4

not

not to indulge even in sins, once dearer to them than a right hand, or a right eye. Great was the opposition the gospel had to encounter. The superstition of Heathens, the bigotry of Jews, the wisdom of philosophers, the eloquence of orators, the ridicule of men of wit, the authority of princes, the craft of priests, joined in alliance against the gospel, with every vicious inclination, every emotion of pride in the human heart.—To oppose the efforts of this formidable confederacy, men are employed, of no rank and fortune, no power and influence; no policy or learning. The bold attempt provokes the vengeance of earth and hell on them and their followers. Yet, fines, banishment, torture, death, inflicted with every circumstance of cruelty, could not deter multitudes, of the tenderest age and sex, from boldly and openly professing a religion, against which, a little before, they had been deeply prejudiced. Tentmakers, publicans and fishermen, by preaching the plain truths of Christianity, without the ornaments of eloquence, or enticing words of man's wisdom; by enforcing duties contrary to every corrupt affection; and by patiently suffering persecution for the word of their testimony; are honoured, as the instruments of accomplishing a great and most improbable change in the sentiments, tempers, and manners of men. The more they are persecuted, the more they grow. They who led them captive, are themselves captivated by Divine truth. Meanness proves an overmatch for greatness, foolishness for wisdom, weakness for strength. Philosophy is baffled and silenced by unpolished simplicity. The sheep overcome the wolves, the lambs the lions, the doves the birds of prey; and the gospel treasure is in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might appear

pear to be of God. The gracious influences, and miraculous gifts of the Spirit, were the only adequate causes of those triumphs of the gospel.

If these things are so, let none employed in preaching the gospel, despair of success. The weapons of our warfare, though not carnal, have proved, and still may prove, mighty, through God, to the pulling down the strong holds of pride and depravity. The Spirit of God can level every mountain of opposition into a plain. The captives of the mighty may be relieved, and the prey of the terrible delivered. The most abandoned profligates, monsters of wickedness, and bitter enemies of Christianity, have been gained by the gospel. God's hand is not now shortened, nor his grace diminished. He that gathereth the people to Shiloh, can, and will, gather others unto him, besides the multitudes whom he hath already gathered. Great as the evil and enmity of men may be, God can overcome their evil with his good. The cause of the gospel, is a cause, which the mercy, the faithfulness, the honour of God, is engaged in prospering: a cause, in support of which, the Almighty delights to make bare his arm.

Thousands of the Gentiles, who never enjoyed such advantages as you, have believed on Christ. Do ye also believe? and, is your faith the mysterious faith of the operation of God? Is it built on the gospel testimony? Hath it come by reading or hearing the word? Art thou, my fellow sinner, encouraged, by the full and free offers of Christ, to look to him for salvation? And, didst thou find it impossible for thee to do this, till He, with whom all things are possible, wrought in thee all the good pleasure of his goodness, and a work of faith with power? Or, is thy faith
built

built on a presumptuous conceit, that the law of God, or the obligation strictly to obey it, is now relaxed, and that, with all thy defects, thou hast worth and excellency sufficient to recommend thee to Christ? The faith of God's elect must fight, and strive for its life, with Satan, the world, and the flesh, those powerful enemies, who unweariedly seek to destroy it; and, was it not upheld by the Everlasting Arms, would fight and strive in vain. If thy faith has been easily attained, and easily preserved, thou hast cause to fear, it gives no alarm to the powers of darkness.

Thou, who art hitherto an unbeliever, be exhorted now to believe on Jesus. Faith unites to Him, and that union insures pardon of sin, freedom from the curse of the law, peace and friendship with God; an interest in His fatherly care, conduct, provision, and protection; boldness of access to a throne of grace; all needful influences of the Spirit here, and the heavenly inheritance hereafter. But, without faith, thou canst have no interest in Christ, no interest in those inestimable blessings of his purchase. The gospel was written and preached chiefly for this end, that those naturally dead in trespasses and sins, might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that, believing, they might have life in his name^e. The word preached, if not mixed with faith in thy soul, instead of profiting thee, aggravates thy guilt here, and will add to thy misery hereafter. This is God's commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ^f. If thou hearkenest not to this commandment, thou must perish with the children of disobedience. Thy prayers will not be answered, thy duties will be rejected, and all thy endeavours in re-

ligion

^e Jo. xx. 31,

^f 1 Jo. iii. 23,

ligion lost. For, where the gospel is preached, the faithful and true witness hath assured us, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned s."

You, who through grace believe, adore the Almighty and compassionate God, who, notwithstanding the opposition of your own depraved inclinations, and of the numerous hosts of your spiritual enemies, hath conquered and captivated your hearts. Had not Divine grace and power been thus marvellously exercised towards you, you had died in unbelief, and thus died in your sins. Walk worthy of God, unto all well-pleasing; and show forth the sincerity of your faith, by being careful to maintain good works: and, as you would wish to grow in holiness, study to grow in faith. Faith blunts the edge of temptation, shields against the assaults of the powers of darkness, encourages to undertake the most difficult services, and can do all things, through Christ strengthening. How animating the thought, O believers, that your merciful High Priest, perfumes your sacrifices, with the incense of his merits and intercession; and that your meanest acts of obedience, performed with sincerity and singleness of heart, shall in nowise lose their reward! From strong and lively views of this, be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. You have the honour and happiness of serving a Master, who will take in good part the labours you undertake, and the sufferings you endure, for his name's sake. Trust in the Saviour, both for strength to perform duty, and for the acceptance of your persons and performances. This will
enlarge

enlarge your hearts to run in the ways of God's commandments. Christ crucified, is meat indeed, and drink indeed : and, by feeding on this glorious provision ; inclination, strength and spirit for duty, shall be conveyed to your souls.

To conclude. We, according to God's promise, wait for a period, when the great things contained in our text, shall be better understood, by being more fully accomplished. The happy day shall dawn, when, in every corner of the habitable earth, Christ shall be preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together : for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it ^h. Let it be our united prayer : " Now, O " Lord God, the word thou hast spoken concerning " the Saviour, and concerning his spiritual seed, e- " stablish it for ever, and do as thou hast said ⁱ."

^h II. xl. 5.

ⁱ 2 Sam. vii. 25.

DISCOURSE XV.

JESUS RECEIVED UP INTO GLORY.

I TIMOTHY iii. 16.

GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH, JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT, SEEN
OF ANGELS, PREACHED UNTO THE GENTILES, BELIEVED ON IN
THE WORLD, RECEIVED UP INTO GLORY.

THIS is the last branch of the mystery of godliness, as described in my text. And indeed, the power and majesty of the exalted Jesus, must terrify, not comfort the soul, which has not first viewed him, assuming human nature to purchase redemption, offered to every one in the gospel, and united to all who believe as their husband and friend. When we think, that he who ascended, first descended into the lowest parts of the earth, and both descended and ascended, was humbled and exalted for our benefit; then, and not till then, comfort and joy spring up, from what would otherwise fill with dread.

Whether we consider these words, as relating to the person of Jesus, or to his mediatorial character, they contain an incomprehensible mystery. His glory as God could not be diminished or increased. As man, he was the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely. In his lowest abasement, he remained the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person. His humanity, as united with his divine person, had a right to the glory of heaven,
and

and to every thing great and honourable. Had he however exacted this right, the great end of his incarnation, even his dying for lost mankind, could not have been accomplished. Had the princes of the world known him to be, what indeed he was, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory ^a. For our sakes, therefore, though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ^b. Rich in his original honours and bliss, he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich ^c. Though he had a sufficient title to glory for himself, he suspends his claims, till he procure us a title to it also. The low circumstances in which he appeared, veiled and obscured his native dignity. His excellencies shone not with such a glare, as to strike the vulgar eye, or to be admired by the unenlightened soul. The greater part of his cotemporaries perceived no form nor comeliness in him, why he should be desired ^d. In his humbled state, he set the Lord always before him; and because God was at his right hand, was never moved in any instance to swerve from the paths of duty ^e. He glorified the Father on earth, and faithfully performed and completely finished the arduous work given him to do ^f. Therefore the Father, who had bruised him and put him to grief, in testimony of full satisfaction with all that he had done, leaves not his soul in the separate state, and suffers not his body to see corruption: but shows him the path of life, and welcomes him to His presence, where is fulness of joy; and to His right hand, where
are

^a 1 Cor. ii. 8.^b Phil. ii. 6, 7.^c 2 Cor. viii. 9.^d Is. liii. 2.^e Ps. xvi. 8.^f Jo. xvii. 4.

are pleasures for evermore ^s. The man of sorrows, ceases from his works, rests from his labours and sufferings, and alone, of all mankind, enters the heavenly mansions by the gate of his own personal merit and righteousness. He, who on earth, was in all the sinless infirmities of humanity made like to his brethren; now possesseth our nature in its highest lustre and perfection. He, who hid not his face from shame and spitting, is now set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ^h. The vail which hid his glory is removed; every circumstance concurs to manifest it; and saints and angels, with wonder and joy, behold his human nature as subsisting in the person of the Son of God.

I am not, however, to enlarge on these things, but rather consider the glory into which Jesus is received, as Mediator. And here,

(1.) He is invested with the glorious office of interceding for lost sinners, and thus procuring their reconciliation and acceptance with God. Never was there a priest or advocate so truly glorious. What glorious things are spoken of the Redeemer in the epistle to the Hebrews! and yet, this is represented as the substance of them all: Heb. viii. 1, 2. "Now, of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such a High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." And, what is his ministry in the heavenly tabernacle? Doubtless, he precedes in the worship and services of his church. If the holy place made with hands, was the figure of the true, heaven, like them, is the place of

^s Ps. xvi. 10, 11.

^h Heb. i. 3.

of solemn worship. The blessed above are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in his temple¹. With incessant delight and exultation, that august assembly of angels and men, join in celebrating the praises of God. But, in these praises, Jesus takes the lead. Hence he is represented saying, *Pf. xl. 1—3.*, “ I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet on a rock, and established my goings : And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” Of this worship, in which the Redeemer precedes, we have also a description, *Rev. xiv. 1—3.* “ And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder ; and I heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps : and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts and the elders : and no man could learn that song, but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.”—Yet, it is not so much in his leading the worship of the redeemed, as in the procuring the acceptance of their persons and services, that his ministrations in the heavenly sanctuary appear glorious. In the height of his dignity, he forgets not the meanest of his people. Like Aaron, who carried the names of all the tribes of Israel upon his breastplate, when he entered the tabernacle ; this greater than Aaron, bears upon his heart

¹ *Rev. vii. 15.*

heart the names and circumstances of all his people; knows their manifold necessities, and presents to the Father his own obedience and sufferings, as an ever-prevailing motive for bestowing upon them what indeed is best. "For Christ is not entered into the
 " holy places made with hands, which are the figures
 " of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear
 " in the presence of God for us ^j." God can deny him nothing, and therefore will not deny us any thing which we ask in his name. The friendship of the greatest favourite in the court of an earthly prince, may prove of no avail. Jonathan, the son of King Saul, pled with his father in behalf of David, and pled in vain. But God hath given to his Only Begotten Son, his heart's desire; and never hath, never shall, withhold from him the request of his lips ^k. This is our privilege under the gospel dispensation, that we are come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel ^l. When the trembling sinner stands before the angel of the Lord, clothed with filthy garments, and Satan stands to resist him in his humble approach to the mercy-seat; the angel says unto him, "Behold, I have caused
 " thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe
 " thee with change of raiment ^m." He stands at the altar, having a golden censer; and there is given unto him much incense, that he should offer it, with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar, which is before the throne ⁿ. And, O how comfortable the thought, that whereas the priests of Aaron's race, were not suffered to continue by reason of death; this

F f

man,

^j Heb. ix. 24.^k Ps. xxi. 2.^l Heb. xii. 24.^m Zech. iii. 1—4.ⁿ Rev. viii. 3.

man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood ! wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them ^o. In acting on earth as a priest, he bore the curse of the law, the hidings of the Father's face, yea, the direful effects of his indignation. But now, the reproach of the cross is done away. The priestly office, as well as the priest, is glorified ; while the Saviour sits as a priest on his throne ^p, and, with a voice full of majesty, not, as in Gethsemane, with strong cryings and tears, claims the blessings upon his people, for which he obeyed, and for which he suffered.

(2.) Jesus is invested with the high and honourable office, of imparting saving light and life to the world, by the influences of his Spirit and grace. I mean not here to consider the glory of Jesus as the head of the glorified creation, the medium of all the communications of bliss they receive from God, and the bond of union between things in heaven and things on earth ; though, what Scripture hints on that subject, Eph. i. 10. and Col. i. 20., merits our devout attention. I only speak of Jesus, as the channel through which all blessings are conveyed to his ransomed ones. On the cross, he encountered and overcame the powers of darkness. When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive ^q. Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them ^r, dragging the vanquished foes at his chariot-wheels, in sight of the attendants of his ascension : and all this was, that, having received gifts, he might bestow them upon men, even the rebellious ^s. In him,

^o Heb. vii. 23—25.

^p Zech. vi. 13.

^q Eph. iv. 8.

^r Col. ii. 15.

^s Ps. lxxviii. 18.

him, it pleased the Father, that all fulness should dwell ^t. All our well springs are in him ^u; and from him only, our fruit can be found ^v. He was indeed the head of influences, even to saints under the Old Testament. But this branch of his glory was little known in that darker dispensation; and his salutary influences were then imparted to smaller numbers, and in a less plenteous degree. The grand outpouring of the Spirit, was reserved to do honour to a risen and ascended Redeemer. This we are expressly taught, Jo. vii. 38, 39.; xii. 31, 32.; xvi. 7. What a comfort is it to unconverted sinners, convinced of their guilt and depravity, that God, having raised up his Son Jesus, hath sent him to bless us, in turning us from our iniquities ^w! And though, as to his visible presence, he is now no more in the world, and the heavens must retain him till the time of the restitution of all things: what a comfort is it to saints, that, in a spiritual and more important sense, he hath said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world ^x," to maintain, to strengthen, and increase in you the divine life! God hath set Christ as King on his holy hill of Zion ^y. He procures himself, from the midst of his enemies, multitudes of willing subjects, by a day of his Almighty power ^z. He rules the spirits of men, he alters their natural bias, he subdues their unruly appetites, and turns the stream of their affections into a new and opposite channel. Having imparted the spark of divine life; even in the midst of storms and tempests, he preserves it from being extinguished. Glorious Sovereign, who makes

F f 2

all

^t Col. i. 19.^u Ps. lxxxvii. 7.^v Hof. xiv. 8.^w Acts iii. 26.^x Matth. xxviii. 20.^y Ps. ii. 6.^z Ps. cx. 2, 3.

all his subjects inwardly beautiful and glorious ! Glorious empire, where all derive from their Sovereign, righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ! Better to have the Spirit of Christ, without his bodily presence, than to have his bodily presence without the Spirit. Mysterious as these things are, they are not incredible. If the influence of an earthly prince reaches to every corner of his wide extended dominions, though his presence is confined to one place ; and, if the sun, though at so vast a distance from our globe, incessantly enlightens, warms, and cherishes it, by his refreshing beams : shall men pronounce it impossible, that virtue, communicated from an ascended Redeemer, should revive the parched, withered, decayed graces of his people, and impart saving light to them that sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death ?

(3.) Jesus is advanced to the glory of universal dominion. To Him, whom men despised ; to Him, whom the nation abhorred, to a Servant of rulers ; dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, are given, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him. Not only is he constituted head of influences to the Church, but head of dominion over all things for their benefit ^a. All power is given to him in heaven and in earth ^b ; and therefore, no event can fall out, in the visible or invisible world, without his permission. The reins of government, O believer, are entrusted to thy best friend ; and, when the church is lowest, her head sits at the right hand of God. And, tell me, does he sit there, and do nothing ? No, my brethren, he is thus exalted, that he may make all his enemies his footstool ^c. Though, for a season, enemies may trample

^a Eph. i. 22.^b Matth. xxviii. 18.^c Ps. cx. 1.

trample his church under foot, ere long he shall trample under foot the most powerful of those enemies. He sits at the helm : and, though storms may arise and toss the ship, while he seems asleep, yet no storm shall be able to sink her. The gates of hell shall never prevail against her. Winds may blow, and waves may beat upon her ; but she shall stand, being founded on a rock. Though the bush, where the angel of the covenant is present, may burn, it shall never be consumed. The united power of men and devils, must prove too feeble, in opposition to the thrice happy men, who have God for the shield of their strength, and the sword of their excellency. If the Church is cast into a furnace, in that furnace she only loses her dross, and is brought out of it, as gold tried in the fire, purified seven times. Let not her enemies rejoice over her : for, though she fall, she shall arise again ; though she walk in darkness, the Lord will give her light. There is no counsel or might against the Lord. All created power is upheld and limited by him, and therefore can never act without his wise permission : and that permission then only he gives, when it is truly best for his people that he should give it. All things therefore shall work together for good, to them that love him, and that are the called according to his purpose.

(4.) Christ is received into glory, as the forerunner of his people, and the pattern of their approaching bliss. When the fatal apostasy had debarred our access to the heavenly paradise, a new and living way was opened, through the obedience of Christ, and the rent veil of his flesh. The God of Peace hath brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and hath thereby declared the per-

all his subjects inwardly beautiful and glorious ! Glorious empire, where all derive from their Sovereign, righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ! Better to have the Spirit of Christ, without his bodily presence, than to have his bodily presence without the Spirit. Mysteries as these things are, they are not incredible. If the influence of an earthly prince reaches to every corner of his wide extended dominions, though his presence is confined to one place ; and, if the sun, though at so vast a distance from our globe, incessantly enlightens, warms, and cherishes it, by his refreshing beams : shall men pronounce it impossible, that virtue, communicated from an ascended Redeemer, should revive the parched, withered, decayed graces of his people, and impart saving light to them that sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death ?

(3.) Jesus is advanced to the glory of universal dominion. To Him, whom men despised ; to Him, whom the nation abhorred, to a Servant of rulers ; dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, are given, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him. Not only is he constituted head of influences to the Church, but head of dominion over all things for their benefit ^a. All power is given to him in heaven and in earth ^b ; and therefore, no event can fall out, in the visible or invisible world, without his permission. The reins of government, O believer, are entrusted to thy best friend ; and, when the church is lowest, her head sits at the right hand of God. And, tell me, does he sit there, and do nothing ? No, my brethren, he is thus exalted, that he may make all his enemies his footstool ^c. Though, for a season, enemies may trample

^a Eph. i. 22.^b Matth. xxviii. 18.^c Ps. cx. 1.

trample his church under foot, ere long he shall trample under foot the most powerful of those enemies. He sits at the helm: and, though storms may arise and toss the ship, while he seems asleep, yet no storm shall be able to sink her. The gates of hell shall never prevail against her. Winds may blow, and waves may beat upon her; but she shall stand, being founded on a rock. Though the bush, where the angel of the covenant is present, may burn, it shall never be consumed. The united power of men and devils, must prove too feeble, in opposition to the thrice happy men, who have God for the shield of their strength, and the sword of their excellency. If the Church is cast into a furnace, in that furnace she only loses her dross, and is brought out of it, as gold tried in the fire, purified seven times. Let not her enemies rejoice over her: for, though she fall, she shall arise again; though she walk in darkness, the Lord will give her light. There is no counsel or might against the Lord. All created power is upheld and limited by him, and therefore can never act without his wise permission: and that permission then only he gives, when it is truly best for his people that he should give it. All things therefore shall work together for good, to them that love him, and that are the called according to his purpose.

(4.) Christ is received into glory, as the forerunner of his people, and the pattern of their approaching bliss. When the fatal apostasy had debarred our access to the heavenly paradise, a new and living way was opened, through the obedience of Christ, and the rent veil of his flesh. The God of Peace hath brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and hath thereby declared the per-

fection and acceptableness of his obedience and sacrifice: for had they been imperfect, God would not have thus taken him from prison and from judgment. Christ having therefore paid the debt of punishment, which we owed to Divine Justice, and purchased for us the heavenly bliss; it remained, that, as our representative and harbinger, he should in our name enter into the possession of the purchased inheritance. And hence, certainty arises, that as the natural body of Christ has been received into glory, every particular member of his mystical body shall be received into it also: for it was to purchase glory for his mystical body, that he took upon him flesh and blood. In the name of his Church, he lived, he died, he rose again; he was received into glory. On this account, we are said to be quickened together with Christ, to be raised up together, and to be made to sit together in heavenly places ^d. We have a glorious life hid with Christ in God. And when Christ shall appear, that life shall be revealed, and we also shall appear with him in glory ^e. Hence, our Lord thus comforted his disciples: "In
 " my Father's house are many mansions; if it were
 " not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a
 " place for you. And, if I go and prepare a place
 " for you, I will come again, and receive you to my-
 " self, that where I am, there you may be also ^f." As the earthly paradise was provided for Adam, before he was created; so a place was secured for the Christian in the heavenly paradise ere ever he was born. When we behold our pious friends breathing their last, or when we ourselves walk through the dark valley and shadow of death, let us rejoice, that they and we are hastening to that better country, whither the

^d Eph. ii. 5, 6.^e Col. iii. 3, 4.^f Jo. xiv. 2, 3.

the forerunner hath for us entered s. “ There sits
 “ my Saviour in glory. There hath he prepared for
 “ me a house, not made with hands, eternal in the
 “ heavens. What though I have wandered in a solitary
 “ wilderness, and found no city to dwell in, if God is
 “ leading me in the right way to the heavenly city of
 “ habitation? What though I am accounted the filth
 “ of the earth, and the offscourings of all things?
 “ Time was, when my Saviour and Lord suffered like
 “ usage. None was ever so abused, and none is now
 “ so exalted. And, through my glorified head, I
 “ trust, that my lowest abasement shall be the fore-
 “ runner of my advancement and glory. My Saviour,
 “ who was once scourged and spit upon, and nailed
 “ to a cross, is now highly exalted, and has all things
 “ put under his feet. If I suffer with him, I shall al-
 “ so reign with him. I hear the Son of God speak-
 “ ing in the language of authority: Father, I will
 “ that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be
 “ with me, where I am, to behold my glory. The
 “ will of men may be frustrated by their weakness, or
 “ by their death; but Christ lives and reigns in hea-
 “ ven, to make effectual the kind purposes of his
 “ heart. Not content to be glorified alone, it is his
 “ gracious will, that his people sit down with him on
 “ his throne, even as he sat down on the Father’s
 “ throne. No wonder, that Paul was willing to be
 “ absent from the body, and present with the Lord.
 “ No wonder, that he longed to depart, and to be
 “ with Christ. Surely this is better than the best that
 “ can be enjoyed in this pilgrimage state. Earth can
 “ afford nothing so delightful and satisfying, that the
 “ spouse of Christ would deign to compare with the

F f 4

“ immediate

s Heb. vi. 29.

“ immediate presence and fellowship of her Husband
“ and Lord.”

I now conclude with some improvement of the subject.

(1.) Let our conversation and hearts be, where our Lord is. As men risen with Christ, as men for whom he is preparing mansions of bliss, let us seek the things which are above, where he sitteth at the right hand of God. Let us set our affections on things above, not on things below. Fix thine eye, fix thy thoughts on heaven, and on Him who purchased heaven for thee, and ascended thither as thy forerunner. Thou wouldst not remain so cold and comfortless a Christian, didst thou oftener behold the King in his beauty, and the land that is afar off. Didst thou keep thy heart nearer the Sun of Righteousness, opening it to his warming, enlightening, enlivening rays: holiness and joy would not be such strangers there. If thy devout meditations dwelt more with Christ in his glory: thy life would breathe more of heaven; and courage, vigour, and activity, in the service of thy God, would become natural and easy. Thou wouldst find less leisure to attend to the solicitations of an ensnaring world. And if the world frowned, thou wouldst take it joyfully; knowing that thy light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for thee a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. Yet, though growth in holiness, and increase of comfort, are so much promoted by frequent devout meditation on an enthroned Redeemer, how difficultly are men engaged in this delightful, improving exercise! How easy to think on that which is mean and trifling! How painful to fix our thoughts on that which is infinitely excellent!

If Jesus had not thought more about us, than we ordinarily do about him, what would have become of us? Mean and vile as we were, he entertained thoughts of redeeming, sanctifying, glorifying us. Yea, from eternity his delights were with the sons of men. And, shall it be so hard a matter to fix our thoughts on Him, whose loveliness is infinite, and whose love to us hath no parallel? Is this an evidence of our love to the unseen Jesus? It is an evidence, that, if we have any, it is weak as a smoking flax. If an angel was commissioned to assure thee, that next month thou shouldst be with Christ in paradise: would it be with thee, as it now is? Would not things invisible make other, and more powerful impressions on thy heart? And how knowest thou, that thy birth-day into glory is even at that distance? Ere another week, ere another day, thou mayest join the august assembly of saints and angels, and enter into the joy of thy Lord. Ah! that the short-lived unsatisfying enjoyments of sense, and the conversation of gay and thoughtless sinners, should divert thy attention from such exalted prospects. Thy country, thine inheritance, thy husband, thy head, is in heaven.

(2.) Let, O Christian, the majesty and greatness of thy Lord, excite thee to a bold undisguised profession of thy regards to him. Let not the scorns and jeers of profane witlings make thee ashamed of thy glorious head. Let not the fears of reproach, disgrace, or persecution, betray thee to risk His displeasure, who hath all power in heaven and in earth. Thinkest thou that the blessed in heaven are ashamed of their ardent love to Christ, and their diligence, circumspection, and steadfastness in his service? When thou thyself shalt enter the invisible world, is there not more danger
thou

thou prove ashamed of the smallness, than of the greatness of thy services? Indeed, thy warmest love, and most active self-denying obedience, can never be great enough, for One, so glorious in himself, and to whom thou hast been so deeply indebted. Christ, in all his glory, mean and polluted as thou art, is not ashamed to call thee brother. Be not thou ashamed, to call One, so great and so good, Saviour and Lord.

(3.) Debase not that nature, which God hath thus exalted in the person of Christ. Our nature, in him, is advanced above the angels, and is next in dignity to the nature of God. It was impossible, that human nature, remaining such, could be advanced higher. Our nature, in Christ, is gone to the highest place in heaven; is advanced above all principalities and powers, and invested with universal dominion. And shall we dishonour, shall we defile and pollute it, by the ignoble slavery of sin and Satan? No, my brethren. Let us act worthy of our character as members of the mystical body of Christ. Let us conduct ourselves suitably to our own dignity, and to the dignity of our exalted head. Upon earth, let us begin the life of heaven; and prove, that our hopes of being like Christ in another world, are well founded, by purifying ourselves as he is pure. Resemble him in grace we must, ere we resemble him in glory. God will not fill the heavenly mansions with those, who on earth are the scandal of their Christian profession, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and habitually neglecting the plainest duties. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.

(4.) How great the happiness of those, who are admitted to heaven, and who there behold the glory of the Redeemer! How inexpressible their transport,
who,

who, having passed the storms and tempests of mortality, find themselves with their best friend, see his glory, and see and feel their own interest in it! With what love to their brethren yet on earth, do they behold Jesus presenting their prayers before the throne, making intercession for them, pleading their cause against all their adversaries, transacting all their affairs in the court of heaven, and taking effectual care that none of them perish! They see that glory of Christ, in the discharge of his priestly office, within the sanctuary, of which the ceremonies of the law were an obscure representation, and which, even under the clearer light of the gospel, were very imperfectly known. With rapture they see him as a priest upon his throne, invested with sovereign authority, and endowed with Almighty power, to accomplish all that for his Church, on account of which he thus intercedes.

The ascension of Christ into glory, and his ministering in the heavenly sanctuary, were considerable additions to the happiness of saints who had departed this life under the Old Testament dispensation. Till then, they could not behold the glory of God, in Christ's actual purchase of redemption. Till then, there was no throne of grace erected in heaven, no high priest appearing before it, no lamb as it had been slain, no joint ascription of glory to Him who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb; God having ordained some better thing for us, that they, without us, should not be made perfect^h. They had believed the promise of grace and mercy through the Messiah to come. But the way in which the Redeemer was to procure those blessings, the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, neither they nor the angels could distinctly

^h Heb. xi. 39, 40.

stinctly apprehend ⁱ. Saints knew that something farther was to be done, for exalting God's glory in their complete salvation. What that something was, with joy they perceived, when Christ entered into the heavenly sanctuary. With ineffable delight, they now behold the realities, which the patterns of things in heaven had shadowed out. They now see, what they had desired, and prayed, and longed to see, in the days of their flesh. Even the knowledge and happiness of angels was hereby increased ^j. God reconciles all things to himself, whether things on earth, or things in heaven ^k. Angels rejoice more than ever in man's salvation; for more than ever they now see the glory of God great in that salvation. The admiration and praise of those benevolent spirits, and of the nations of the redeemed, abundantly compensate all the contempt cast on Christ's mediation by those who dwell on the earth. Even New Testament saints exchange their enjoyments and services, for enjoyments and services infinitely superior. The heavenly Jerusalem hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof ^l.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 10—12.^j Eph. iii. 9, 10.^k Col. i. 20.^l Rev. xxi. 23.

DISCOURSE XVI.

IN THREE PARTS.

POWER GIVEN TO CHRIST FOR BLESSING THE ELECT.

JOHN xvii. 2.

AS THOU HAST GIVEN HIM POWER OVER ALL FLESH, THAT HE SHOULD GIVE ETERNAL LIFE TO AS MANY AS THOU HAST GIVEN HIM.

PART I.

THESE words present to our contemplation, three glorious mysteries of wisdom and grace. The foundation of redemption, laid before the world was; power exercised, in time, for the benefit of the elect; and complete happiness conferred upon them, when time shall be no more. All these, the sacred oracles declare incomprehensible. We cannot fathom the reason, why some of Adam's posterity, rather than others, were given to Christ, in the covenant of redemption; but must say, with the apostle, "^a O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Equally unfathomable, is the government of the world, uniformly conducted by Christ to promote the good of his church, even when it seems to thwart it. "^b As thou knowest not the way of the Spirit, nor how
" the

^a Rom. xi. 33.

^b Eccles. xi. 5.

“ the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with
 “ child : even so, thou knowest not the works of
 “ God, who maketh all.” The same may be observ-
 ed of the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory,
 which God hath prepared for his people. “ * It doth
 “ not yet appear what we shall be.” Something, how-
 ever, may be known of those mysteries, even in this
 state of darkness and imperfection. To lead you to
 scriptural sentiments, and a suitable practical improve-
 ment of them, we have made choice of these words :
 And, in discoursing from them, shall, *first*, explain,
 The gift of the elect to Christ ; *2dly*, The power over
 all flesh, given to Christ, in behalf of those given him
 by the Father ; *3dly*, The eternal life, which certainly
 shall be given to all that happy number ; and, *4thly*,
 The connexion of Christ’s power over all flesh, with
 his giving eternal life to those given him by the Fa-
 ther.

I. I return to the first of these, the gift of a certain
 number of mankind to Jesus. Some, who believe this
 doctrine, think it ought never to be introduced into
 the pulpit. But they would do well to remember,
 that all scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,
 for correction, and for instruction in righteousness ;
 and that a minister cannot be pure from the blood of
 all men, who shuns to declare the whole counsel of
 God. They derogate from the wisdom and holiness
 of the blessed Spirit, who suppose he has revealed what
 was pernicious, or even useless. This doctrine, I rea-
 dily allow, hath been, and may be abused. But, is
 this abuse proof sufficient that it ought to be conceal-
 ed ? No. Unless the most fundamental articles of
 Christianity

* 1 Jo. iii. 3.

Christianity are unfit to be published ; unless we must cease to preach the justice of God, lest one be driven to despair ; or his mercy and grace, lest another turn them into wantonness. Let us not, therefore, banish from the pulpit the doctrine of election, for reasons, which, if they prove any thing, prove, that the terrors of the law, and the full and free offers of salvation in the gospel, ought to be thus banished.

In order to lead you to scriptural views of this mysterious doctrine, I observe,

1. The Father's giving the elect to Christ, supposes that they were his property ; and, indeed, they are once and again termed so in this chapter. Ver. 6. " I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." Ver. 9. " I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me ; for they are thine." The meaning is not, that they belonged to the Father by right of creation ; but that they were his, by virtue of special choice, and unchangeable affection. The gift of the elect to Christ, originated from the Father's love to men wretched and worthless : and he who gave them to Christ, and delivered Christ to the death for their redemption, surely intended, with him, freely to give them all things, and especially things so necessary for their salvation as the preaching of the gospel, and those enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Spirit, which render that preaching effectual. Even the Old Testament intimates this electing love of the Father, and that the sending the Son to purchase salvation, and the Spirit to apply it, flow from that love. " ^d For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his
" peculiar

“peculiar treasure.” “^c The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it: Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it as his habitation.” “^f The Lord hath appeared of old unto me saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee.” God hath not appointed those favourite ones to wrath, but to obtain salvation^g; and this appointment respected not only their future blifs, but all the necessary means of qualifying them for, and bringing them to, the possession of it. For God hath chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth^h.—I only add, that this choice was eternal. It will be acknowledged, that all who die in a state of faith and holiness, are then elected: but, if so, their election was eternal. As there can be no beginning, and no change of the Divine being and perfections: so, the perceptions of God’s understanding, and the determinations of his will, had no beginning, and are capable of no change. What, therefore, he sees to be fit, and determines in time, he saw to be fit, and determined from eternity. Faith is of the operation of God. All God’s works were known to him, and decreed by him before the foundation of the world. None will pretend that God foresaw he would do, what he had not determined to do. New determinations can only arise from some prior defect of wisdom, of power, or of goodness: but, to suppose such defect in God, would be blasphemy.

2. The

^c Pf. cxxxii. 11, 12.^f Jer. xxxi.^g 1 Thes. v. 9.^h 2 Thes. ii. 13.

2. The men thus beloved of the Father, were given to Christ in the covenant of redemption, to do all for them necessary to entitle them to glory; and to do all in them, and for them, necessary to qualify them for, and to put them in possession of, the heavenly bliss. We may learn the purposes for which the elect were given to Christ, from what he has done, and continues to do, in consequence of the trust committed to him by the Father. He hath redeemed them, by price, from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them. They were therefore given him, that, as their Surety and Substitute, he might pour out his soul an offering for their sins; that the chastisement of their peace being thus laid upon him, they, through his stripes, might be healed. As Captain of Salvation; he conducts an innumerable multitude to glory, through the paths of faith and holiness. They were therefore given him, that he might sanctify them through the truth, keep them from the evils of the world, and, at length, present them to the Father, without spot or wrinkle. The scripture asserts, that they were given him, not barely to purchase for them a possibility of salvation, but to render their salvation infallibly certain. “ⁱ But ye believe not, because “ ye are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. “ They follow me. I give unto them eternal life. “ They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck “ them out of my hand. My Father which gave “ them me, is greater than all: and none is able to “ pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” “^k This “ is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all “ which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but “ should raise it up again at the last day.” In conse-

G g

quence

ⁱ Jo. x. 26—29.^k Jo. vi. 39.

quence of the Redeemer's making his soul an offering for sin, he was to see his seed ^l; to become God's salvation to the ends of the earth ^m: and even the Hea-then were to be given him for an inheritance, and the utmost ends of the earth for a possession ⁿ. Surely, this implies more than purchasing a possibility of salvation for mankind, upon conditions, whose performance depended on their own precarious choice, whether they should or should not fulfil them; and grace for fulfilling which, God was under no engagement to the Redeemer to bestow upon any. The Redeemer's office obliged him to bring in other sheep, not of the Jewish fold ^o. The Father which sent him was to draw them ^p; and they were to become willing subjects in the day of Christ's power ^q. The exalted Prince and Saviour was to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins, not barely to render their repentance and forgiveness possible ^r. If all the promises of God are, in Jesus, yea and amen ^s; and if the elect are blessed with all spiritual blessings in him ^t: surely, those chief promises must be fulfilled, and those chief blessings bestowed, in consequence of his sufferings, merits, and intercession, and by the efficacy of his grace; of which we read, Ezek. xi. 19, 20.; xxxvi. 26, 27. Jer. xxxi. 33.; xxxii. 39. It is in the behalf of Christ, that it is given to any to believe on him ^u; and, if he gave himself for us, it was, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ^x.

3. The persons thus given to Christ, were a select, determinate number, not the whole of mankind. I have

^l If. liii. 10—12.

^m If. xlix. 4—6.

ⁿ Pf. ii. 8.

^o Jo. x. 16.

^p Jo. vi. 44.

^q Pf. cx. 3.

^r Acts v. 31; Eph. i. 7.; Math. xxvi. 28.

^s 2 Cor. i. 20.

^t Eph. i. 3.

^u Phil. i. 29.

^x Tit. ii. 14.

have just now shown, that none given to Christ shall finally perish, as it is certain, and generally acknowledged, that many of mankind shall. My text informs us, that Christ's power extends over all flesh, or over mankind, without exception. If his commission to give eternal life, had not other limits than his empire of providence; why would our Lord, in describing the extent of that commission, have varied the expression, from *all*, to *as many as were given him*? This variation more than insinuates, that, though many were given him by the Father, to be safely conducted to the heavenly bliss; yet, that all, without exception, were not included in that gift.

As election was not a decree to save all mankind, what I have observed on a former head, proves, that it was not barely a decree to save such who should happen to believe. The good or bad success of the schemes of God, was not left to the accidental choice of man. Certain determinate persons were singled out from among the rest of the human race, and absolutely ordained to eternal life. Hence we read, Luke x. 20, of those whose names were written in heaven. The decree which determined who should be Head of the redeemed, also determined, who should be the members of his mystical body. If, as David observes ^v, all the members of our natural body were written in God's book, when as yet there were none of them: doubtless the members of Christ, as head of the church, were registered there. When it was determined that Christ should die for sinners of Adam's race, it was also determined, what benefits this or the other individual should derive from his death. We are told ^z, that seats in heaven, of greater or lesser dignity, shall be

G g 2

given

^v Ps. cxxxix. 16.^z Matth. xx. 23.

given to them for whom they were prepared of the Father. Various mansions of bliss were therefore prepared, not indefinitely for such who should happen to attain particular measures of faith and holiness, but for certain persons, whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life, and for whom the kingdom was prepared before the foundation of the world. The opposite opinion, which represents God as equally designing the happiness of all mankind, on the uncertain condition of their repentance, faith and perseverance, supposes that God's gracious designs are either accomplished or baffled, as the sovereign choice of man decides; so that God can extend his love and mercy, no farther than man thinks fit to allow. How different this from the scripture doctrine, that God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and that the purpose of God, according to election, must stand!

4. The persons thus given to Christ, were unworthy of eternal life, yea worthy of damnation as well as others; and therefore, were not chosen on account of their own merit and excellency. The purposes for which they were given to Christ, prove that they were not given in consequence of their own merit; because these purposes argue want of merit, yea positive guilt and pollution. If one died for all, then were all dead ^a. If one undertook to die for all, then in that undertaking all were considered as worthy of death. *If righteousness came, or could have come by the law, by man's own obedience to it, then Christ lived and died in vain* ^b. If the elect deserved not wrath, the condemning them would have been unjust, and Christ's engaging to suffer in their room unnecessary. To suppose

^a 2 Cor. v. 14.

^b Gal. ii. 21.

pose God demanded an atonement, to save men from a punishment, which, without injustice, he could not inflict, is shocking blasphemy. If the elect merited heaven; though the Son of God had never assumed their nature, heaven would have been their portion: and there was no need of the Spirit to renew and sanctify them, if they were naturally meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. In the scheme of redemption through Christ, grace and mercy gloriously shine. But grace and mercy, suppose unworthiness, as well as misery, in those towards whom they are exercised. We read, Rom. xi. 5, of a remnant according to the election of grace. An election of grace necessarily excludes works from being in any sense the foundation of the choice. For, as it immediately follows, v. 6, "If by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." The elect are represented as chosen out of the world^c; and, therefore, were considered as lying under the same guilt and pollution with the rest of mankind. They were clay, out of which the potter, if he pleased, might have made vessels of dishonour^d; *i. e.* they were men whom God might have justly rejected and punished.

5. It was therefore, in this respect, an act of sovereignty, that some were given to Christ, and not others. Paul teaches us this doctrine^e: "Having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Our Lord tells his disciples^f, "It is your Father's

G g 3

" good

Jo. xv. 19. ^d Rom. ix. 21. ^e Eph. i. 5, 6. ^f Luke xii. 32.

“ good pleasure to give you the kingdom ;” and he thus addresses the Father s, “ I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” In God’s dispensations, unmerited favours are bestowed upon some, and others are treated with just severity. These dispensations are as it seemed good in God’s sight, *i. e.* are conformable to his free sovereign will. I know this doctrine is decried by many, as inconsistent with the goodness, the justice, the truth, and the wisdom of God.—But, doth God cease to be good, because all do not equally partake, and were not destined equally to partake, of his goodness ? Is there less goodness in a plan, which secures the happiness of an innumerable multitude, than in a plan, which leaves the happiness of every individual of the human race precarious ? Would the salvation of men have been more probable, by leaving them to follow the dictates of a heart, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ?—Justice doth not require, that the highest manifestations of divine bounty should be granted to every transgressor ; and therefore, doth not require, that every transgressor should be chosen to salvation. No transgressor hath a claim to the renewing influences of the Spirit ; and therefore, no injustice is done him, if God doth not bestow them, and hath not determined to bestow them. If any are destined to punishment, neither is that unjust ; for they suffer, and were destined to suffer no punishment, which their unbelief and other sins do not merit. Nothing could oblige God to pardon any of his rebellious subjects ; or, if he provided

provided a favour for any of them, to do it for mankind, rather than for fallen angels. By giving to Christ a select number of Adam's posterity to be ransomed by his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit: no injury is done to those of them not included in that gift. When an earthly potentate has crushed a rebellion, his granting an indemnity to some of the guilty, doth not render his punishing others of them unjust. Pardon, to those to whom it was granted, was a favour, not a debt. And those can neither claim it as debt or favour, who are not included in the act of grace. Rebels, therefore, against heaven, have no just cause to murmur, because to some of their fellow rebels, their injured sovereign hath vouchsafed unmerited mercy. By the happiness of others, they are not hurt: and they suffer no wrong, if the punishment inflicted on themselves, is no greater than they deserve. God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. No sinner can claim it as a debt; for then it would be justice, not mercy. No injustice, therefore, is done to the sinner, to whom it is not granted. Even the election of Christ, as head of the redeemed, was an act of sovereignty: "For it pleased the Father, that in him all fulness should dwell." Doubtless then, to sovereignty, the election of the members of his mystical body must be ascribed. God is free and sovereign in destining sinners to the lesser blessings of a present life. And no good reason can be assigned, why he should be less so, in destining, or not destining them to the greater blessings of grace and of glory.

6. Though the gift of a certain number of mankind to Christ, was in so far an act of sovereignty, that

G g 4

it

^e Rom. ix. 15, 18.

^f Col. i. 19.

it is founded on no merit in the creature ; yet it flowed not from mere arbitrary will, but from motives transcendently wise and excellent, though motives to us unsearchable. Hence we read, Eph. i. 11, 12., of being “ predestinated according to the purpose of Him, “ who worketh all things after the counsel of his own “ will : that we should be to the praise of his glory.” And the apostle to the Romans, after having treated this subject at great length, breaks forth in a devout exclamation, “ ² O the depth of the riches both of “ the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearch- “ able are his judgements, and his ways past finding “ out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? “ or who hath been his counsellor ?” Counsel, in man, supposes an examining and comparing different possible plans, in order to chuse the best. As all things are naked and open to the eye of God, his examining different plans would be inconsistent with his infinite wisdom. Counsel, therefore, in God, means his doing, without any previous examination, what creatures do in consequence of it : I mean, his choosing that possible plan in preference to all others, which on the whole best became his glorious perfections. The particular reasons of these determinations, are a depth we cannot fathom. We have already argued on another head, that they are not inconsistent with the divine justice and goodness. I now observe, that they are equally consistent with the divine truth and wisdom. Such who allow a general decree to save those who believe, and who die in the faith, and who acknowledge that God foresaw who they were : can urge no objection against the sincerity of gospel offers, from the distinguishing decree of election, which doth not equally

affect

² Rom. xi. 33, 34.

affect their own system. Let them tell, why God calls men to faith and repentance, whose living and dying in unbelief and impenitence he certainly foreknew: and we shall tell, why he calls those who were not ordained to eternal life. The gospel call doth not declare, that every individual to whom it is addressed shall finally be saved: though it invites and commands him to come to Christ for salvation, and assures him, that if he thus comes, Christ will in no ways cast him out. These are the cords of love and bonds of a man, by which the elect are drawn to Christ. Awakened sinners are preserved from despair. The riches of God's patience and long suffering are displayed, even towards those who perish. And the deep depravity of human nature appears, while even the elect are not won by such kind invitations, till free and victorious grace pulls them as brands out of the burning.

It is now time to lead you to some improvement of this subject, and to show that this mysterious doctrine is indeed a doctrine according to godliness.

1. How deeply doth it concern every one of us, by making our calling, to make also our election sure? We cannot indeed ascend into heaven, to search whether our names are or are not registered in the book of life. Yet, blessed be God, there is a method, in which we may attain a comfortable well-grounded assurance, that the Father himself loveth us. From the influences of the Spirit bestowed upon us in time, we may safely infer the thoughts of love entertained towards us, and our interest in the council of peace from all eternity. They are warranted to conclude their election of God, to whom the gospel comes, not
in

in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost ^h. If the Holy Ghost hath rendered the word effectual, not only to convince and humble, but to enlighten and sanctify us, we may trace the source from whence those streams of faith and holiness originally flow. If we love God, God first loved us. If we have chosen him, it is because he hath chosen us; that we might go and bring forth fruit, and that our fruit might abound. We were undoubtedly given to Christ, if we have come to him, that we may have life, and have given him our hearts. They who have fled for refuge to the blood and righteousness of Christ, as the only hope set before them, and who are constrained by views of redeeming love, to live, not to themselves, but to him who died and rose again: hereby exhibit infallible evidence, that they are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ ⁱ. They who hunger and thirst after righteousness; who delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man; and who groan under the remains of a body of sin and death, as their most grievous and heavy burden: were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy, and without blame before him in love ^k.

2. I hope I speak to some, whom the God of Peace hath filled with joy and peace in believing, and who know, from a work of grace in their hearts, and from the fruits of that work on their lives, that they are among the happy number whom the Father gave to Christ.—Contemplate with pleasure, O chosen generation, the security of your happiness. From eternity you were the beloved of the Lord: and from eternity
you

^h 1 Thess. iv. 5.ⁱ 1 Pct. i. 2.^k Eph. i. 3.

you were given to Christ in the covenant of redemption, to be redeemed by his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit. And now you have known and believed the love that God hath towards you. He who loved you with an everlasting love, with loving kindness also hath drawn you. The Lord hath remembered you with the favour that he bears to his people, and hath visited you with his salvation. You have seen the good of his chosen, rejoiced in the gladness of his nation, and gloried with his inheritance. Often, in your secret retirements, or in the services of the sanctuary, you have tasted that the Lord is gracious; and he hath manifested himself to you in the riches of his love and grace, so as he doth not to the world. Hail, ye! who are highly favoured: The Lord is with you. Blessed are ye among the sons and daughters of men. And now, if God be for you, who can be against you? The Father will never reject a mediation, which his own unerring wisdom, prompted by his unchangeable love, originally devised. Jesus, by obeying and suffering in your room, and by bestowing upon you grace and glory, executes the Father's plan; and with that the Father must be well pleased. When designs shall misgive, projected by Infinite Wisdom, and entrusted to the management of Almighty Power; then, but not till then, may the elect perish. He, who, authorised by the Father, hath engaged, as Captain of Salvation, to bring many sons unto glory, hath faithfulness, power, and ability, to discharge his trust. He, who gave them to Christ, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of his hand. Conscience, O Christian, may challenge, and Satan may accuse thee: But, who shall effectually lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that

that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us ^l. The God who hath chosen Jerusalem, will rebuke Satan ^m. Many and severe as their troubles may be, all things shall work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose ⁿ. They may be oppressed and perplexed, and find no help in man: But, shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them ^o? Often they may dread their total and final apostasy, when they view the weakness of inherent grace, the strength of remaining corruption, and the snares laid for them by their spiritual enemies. But, notwithstanding their fears, it is impossible the elect should be finally deceived; and for their sakes days of temptation shall be shortened ^p.

With heartfelt gratitude, acknowledge and adore the love of the Father, as the fountain and spring of your redemption. So far was that love from being purchased by Christ, that Christ himself is a fruit thereof. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ^q." The Son of God shed his precious blood, not that God might love you, but that his love might manifest itself towards you, in a way consistent with the honour of his perfections and government. And will you not love him, who first loved you? He might have reserved you, as he did the angels that sinned, in everlasting chains, under darkness, to the judgment of the great day. But, before you had a being, he entertains towards you purposes of kindness and of peace; lays your help upon One that is mighty; and, ere sin had given the deadly wound, provides an

effectual

^l Rom. viii. 33, 34.

^m Zech. iii. 2.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 28.

^o Luke xviii. 7.

^p Matth. xxiv. 22, 24.

^q Jo. iii. 16.

effectual and infallible cure. Ye are bound to give thanks always to God, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth ^r. When rebels and enemies, and when there was nothing in you lovely, even then your time was a time of love. Even then he chose you, not to be servants, but friends: not to enjoy the mean and paltry pleasures of sense, but fulness of joy in his presence, and at his right hand rivers of pleasures for evermore. To all those blessings he chose you; though, in order to his bestowing them, he must not spare his only begotten and well beloved Son; but, for your sakes, deliver him to the death. What warmth of affection, what elevated praise, what cheerful unwearied obedience becomes you, O ye favourites of heaven! Ye are not of the world. Your God and Saviour hath chosen you out of the world. Be not, therefore, conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Your heavenly Father, by his free choice, hath distinguished you from multitudes around you. Study to distinguish yourselves more and more by eminent and exemplary holiness. Your names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Subscribe, therefore, with your hands unto the Lord: and solemnly devote all that you are, and all that you have, to his service.

Ascribe blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, to Him, who so willingly undertook the arduous work of purchasing for you, and of bestowing upon you, the heavenly inheritance. When the Father gave you to Christ, it was on these terms, that, for your sakes, he
should

should live a life of sorrow, and should die a shameful, painful, and accursed death. Could the Son of God, as with a word he made the world, so with a word redeem it, his love would not have appeared so illustrious. But, what was sinful man, that the Equal and Fellow of the Almighty should so prize his salvation, as to undertake to deliver him from the curse of the law, by becoming himself a curse for him? From all eternity, he fully knew what agonies he must suffer, ere the sinner could be saved. And yet, he says, Lo, I come: To do thy will in saving mankind, O my God, I take delight. And, shall not we delight to do thy will, O compassionate Saviour? Shall not thy laws, shall not thy honour, be precious to us, seeing our happiness was thus precious in thy sight?

In times, when vital religion languisheth, when iniquity abounds, when the love of many waxes cold, and when the showers of divine influence are in a great measure withheld: let this doctrine comfort the friends of Jesus. The election shall obtain, though others be blinded. God's council shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. Men shall fear, and honour, and trust in the Redeemer, as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations^s. Even in times, when there is a famine of hearing the word of God: there shall be a handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains: the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth^t. A melancholy prophet may imagine, that of all the servants of God, he only is left alone; when God hath reserved to himself many hidden ones, who have not bowed the knee to Baal. And though, for a time, they should be comparatively few, and, in

a

^s Ps. lxxii. 5,^t Ps. lxxii. 16,

a great measure, concealed from the world, and from one another : a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation ^u. The Lord hath sworn by himself, the word is gone out of his mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength : Even to him shall men come. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory ^{*}.

3. I would, in the last place, exhort the unconverted to improve this doctrine, as a preservative from presumption on the one hand, and from despair on the other.

Dost thou, O sinner, imagine thy guilt comparatively small? Perhaps, through pride and self-flattery, thou feedest on ashes, and a deceived heart hath turned thee aside. But, be it so, that, in presumptuous heaven-daring wickedness, thou art not as other men. Yet, with thee are sins against the Sovereign of the universe, who, in punishing them, may display his righteous severity, to teach his subjects, that even the least act of rebellion is infinitely dangerous. The best of the sons of Adam, need the blood, the righteousness, and the Spirit of Christ. But, though they need them, they deserve them not; and therefore should seek to obtain them with fear and trembling. Perhaps, even now, he who was a liar, and a murderer from the beginning, is whispering in thine ear, that thy transgressions are not so numerous, so heinous, or so highly aggravated, as to give thee any reasonable cause of alarm; and that thy amiable dispositions and good desires, resolutions and endeavours, furnish thee with a better claim than many around thee, to the fa-

VOL. I.

^u Is. lx. 22.^{*} Is. xlv. 23, 24, 25.

your of thy offended Judge. But, alas ! that depravity, which thou art so unwilling to acknowledge, is real enmity against God, who, for the guilt which thou thus overlooks, or extenuates, may justly chasten thee in wrath, and rebuke thee in fore displeasure. If ever thou art saved, thou must be saved by free unmerited grace.—But, on the other hand, though thy sins be red as crimson, and thy heart hard as the nether millstone : yet, let not the greatness of thy sins, or the strength of thy vicious inclinations, discourage thee from seeking mercy. None were ever given to Christ on account of their worthiness : And none, merely because of their unworthiness, did Christ ever reject. The free sovereign love of God, hath pitched on some of the very chief of sinners, and given them to Christ, to secure for them all the blessings of grace and glory. Possibly, vile as thou art, it may have pitched upon thee also. Certainly it hath done it, if, even now, thou art opening the everlasting doors of thy soul, that the King of Glory may come in.

Indulge not thyself in spiritual sloth, by presuming, that, if thou art given to Christ, the grace of his Spirit will, sooner or later, lay hold upon thee. Thy days are with God ; the number of thy months determined ; and, by the Divine decree, bounds are fixed to thy natural life, which it cannot pass. And yet, though thou knowest this, thou art diligent to provide wholesome food for thyself and thy family : and no riches, pleasures or honours, would bribe thee to drink a poisonous draught, or to expose thy defenceless breast to the sword of an enraged enemy. If, on such principles, too absurd to determine thy conduct in worldly matters, thou declineest labouring for the meat that endureth to eternal life, and rushest, by obstinate impenitence,

impenitence, upon God's spear, and upon the thick bosses of his buckler : it must be ascribed, not to the influence of thy religious creed, or to the weakness of thy understanding, but to the rooted depravity of thy heart.

Beware of arguing thus, " I am not elected ; and " therefore, in vain would I think of salvation." Thou canst not know that thou art not elected. Though the least degree of grace would prove thy election, the excess of wickedness in which thou hast indulged, prove thee not a reprobate. Secret things belong to the Lord : but, to thee, the things that are revealed. There is no secret decree, opposite to the connexion revealed in the sacred oracles, between faith and holiness in this life, and eternal happiness in the life to come. Thou hast an invitation to come to Christ ; and a promise, that, if thou come, he will in nowise cast thee out. If, encouraged by the promise, thou acceptest the invitation, that will evidence that the Father gave thee to Christ ; for all that the Father hath given him, and none else, shall come to him. But, if thou finally reject the Saviour, thy condemnation will proceed on this thine unbelief, and not on the Divine decree. Thou shalt perish, not because thou wast not given to Christ, but because, after thou hadst broken the law of God, thou continuedst to refuse a complete Saviour, and a complete salvation, when earnestly, and repeatedly offered to thee in the gospel. Damn not thyself, O transgressor, by persisting in impenitence and unbelief ; and then thou mayest rest assured, the decree of God shall never damn thee.

Perhaps, another will argue, " When I think how " small a proportion of mankind are ordained to eter-

H h

" nal

“nal life, I dare not flatter myself, that one so unworthy as I, am of the happy number.” But none are thus ordained, because of their worthiness; and therefore, thy unworthiness is no proof that God hath left thee to perish. God hath bestowed upon thee great and unmerited favours, denied to many of thy fellow men. To thee, the word of salvation hath been sent. For a long period, God hath waited to be gracious to thee. He hath delivered thee from that careless ignorance, abandoned profligacy, worldly-mindedness, and self-confidence, by which many are led to despise the offered salvation. I acknowledge, all this must tend to thy greater condemnation, if, when God thus stands and knocks at the door of thy heart, thou refuse to open the door. But, of the few who are saved, is there one, who lives and dies thoughtless and secure, though the willing slave of sin and Satan, seeking happiness in worldly enjoyments, or trusting in himself that he is righteous, and despising others? Is it a little thing, that thou art driven from these refuges of lies, and convinced, that, if Christ help thee not, thou must be undone? And, hast thou not heard, hath it not been told thee, where, and how multitudes, thus weary and heavy laden with guilt and depravity, have found rest and relief? Rest and relief is still to be found, where they found it, for thousands, and ten thousands more: and none of those who sought and found it, had any encouragement to seek it, which extends not to thee also.

PART II.

II. I now proceed to consider the power over all flesh given to Christ, in behalf of those given him by the Father. Considered as God, his right to such power is original, and underived. It is essential to him, and necessarily and unalienably his, being founded on his infinite perfection, and the relation in which all flesh stands to Him, as first created, and still upheld by his almighty arm. But he has also an acquired claim to universal dominion, in reward of what he did and suffered as Mediator of a fallen world: and this last, is represented in scripture as the gift of the Father to Jesus. “^a The Father hath loved the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.” “^b And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me, in heaven, and in earth.” “^c God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be Head over all things to the church.” This power is not confined to the church, but extends over all flesh. It extends over the external circumstances of mankind. Some, he exposes to trials: others, he preserves from them. One, he plunges into the depths of adversity: and raises another to the highest pinnacle of worldly prosperity. He woundeth, and healeth: he killeth, and maketh alive. He hath the keys of hell, and of death. He turneth man to destruction; and sayeth, “Return, ye sons of men.” Christ’s power also extends over mens hearts, tempers, and inclinations. By the influences of his grace, he can bow the heart of the most stubborn enemy, and transform him into a willing subject. Nay, he rules

H h 2

even

^a Jo. iii. 35.^b Math. xxviii. 18.^c Eph. i. 22.

even in the midst of those who remain his enemies. The wrath of men praises him ; and the remainder of wrath he restrains. Sometimes, he permits them to contrive and execute wicked designs ; and overrules their ambition or revenge for the good of his people, for correcting their follies, or displaying their graces. On the other hand, he sets bounds to the fury of bad men, stops them in their mad career, withdraws them from their purpose, turns their counsels into foolishness, breaks their union, or leads them to measures, which, in the issue, defeat and confound their accursed intentions. “^d O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, “ and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will “ send him against a hypocritical nation ; and against “ the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, “ to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread “ them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit, “ he meaneth not so ; neither doth his heart think so : “ but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations “ not a few. Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that “ when the Lord hath performed his whole work up- “ on mount Zion, and on Jerusalem, I will punish “ the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, “ and the glory of his high looks.” “^e And I will “ set the Egyptians against the Egyptians ; and they “ shall fight, every one against his brother, and every “ one against his neighbour, city against city, and “ kingdom against kingdom : and the spirit of Egypt “ shall fail in the midst thereof, and I will destroy the “ counsel thereof.” “^f When a man’s ways please “ the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at “ peace with him.” Thus, even the tempers and inclinations, the schemes and enterprises, the conduct
and

^d Is. x. 5, 6, 7, 12.^e Is. xix. 2, 3.^f Prov. xvi. 7.

and behaviour of men, however contingent they appear to us, are under the Mediator's direction and government. " ^s The preparations of the heart in man, " and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord. " A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps." " ^h The king's heart is in the " hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Nothing so high, that is above the reach of this influence: nothing so low, that is beneath it. Nothing so confused, out of which this cannot bring order and glory: nothing so wisely contrived, which this cannot disappoint. Nothing so simply and unpolitically carried on, which this cannot prosper: no operation of natural causes, which this cannot suspend.

Christ's power over the tempers and circumstances of mankind, is what the words of our text directly assert. But they necessarily imply a great deal more: even a power over every part both of the rational and material creation, which has any influence upon those, whether more immediate, or more remote. And when we consider how causes and effects are linked together, and how strongly the most important events are determined by circumstances seemingly trivial and inconsiderable, we might, from this, safely infer, what, in a passage formerly cited, we are expressly assured, that all power is given to Christ, in heaven and in earth. Fire, hail, vapour, and stormy wind, fulfil his will. Holy angels perform, with pleasure, the services in which he employs them; and the powers of darkness cannot move one step, or execute the smallest of their hellish schemes, without his permission. With him, is counsel and might: the deceived, and the de-

H h 3

ceiver,

^s Prov. xvi. 1, 9.^h Prov. xxi. 1.

ceiver, are his. In heaven, in hell, on earth, he doth according to his will : and none can stay his hand, or say to him, What dost thou ? The scripture contains full proofs that the kingdom of providence is thus extensive ; and that the administration of it, in all its extent, belongs to the Redeemer.

The devils believe this power, and tremble. And have not those of Adam's race just cause to be alarmed, who, like them, persist in enmity and opposition to this Mighty One ? No darkness, or shadow of death, can conceal thee, O hardened rebel, from his piercing eye. No defence can protect thee from his vengeance. Heaven, and earth, and hell itself, is ready to execute his wrath against thee, and overwhelm thee to sudden and irresistible ruin. But though he can command the aid of all their numerous hosts, he needs it not. The meanest insect, the least straw or pebble, a hair, a feather, armed with his commission, may prove thy destruction ; may bring down thy body to the dust of death ; and plunge thy soul into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Nay, couldst thou guard against every calamity, and every disease ; yet, if he withdraw his supporting hand, instantly thou must die, and return to thy dust. And, canst thou sleep secure, in a state of such amazing hazard ? He, who is the King of saints, is also the King of nations. He hath a sceptre of mercy, stretched forth to the returning penitent : but he hath also a rod of iron, to dash in pieces the obstinately rebellious. Now, he is exhibited as a compassionate Saviour : ere long, he will appear as an inexorable Judge. If he now entreats thee to be reconciled, those overtures of peace flow not from weakness : for, with infinite ease, he can wound the head of his ene-

mies,

mies, and the hoary scalp of such as go on in their trespasses. There is one Lawgiver, who hath power both to save and to destroy: and dreadful will be the manner in which this power of destruction shall one day be felt, by such who now reject the great salvation. The power of man reaches only to the body. But, gay and thoughtless as thou art, Christ can raise a storm in thy conscience, which all thy strength and artifice shall never be able to allay; sink thee into the very depths of despair, and force thee to become thine own tormentor. Man may kill thee; but Christ can damn thee. Fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.

III. I now proceed to consider the eternal life which shall certainly be bestowed on all who were thus given to Christ by the Father. I might take notice of the beginnings of this eternal life, bestowed in regeneration. A spiritual, heavenly and divine life, is then implanted, which shall never decay. "He that drinketh," says Christ, "of the water that I shall give him, shall never die: for the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of living water, springing up to everlasting lifeⁱ." Hence, the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, "they that have believed, do enter into rest^k." John speaks of God's having already given to us eternal life^l. And our Lord himself: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life^m." But, it is of the spiritual life, as perfected

H h 4

ⁱ Jo. iv. 14.^l Jo. v. 11.^k Heb. iv. 3.^m Jo. v. 24.

fects in heaven, that our Lord chiefly speaks, in the words of our text. In this world, the dead are more numerous than the living. Heaven is the region of life, where no death can enter. Whoever is there, lives and reigns^a. The liveliest saints, while here, carry about with them the remains of a body of sin and death. But, not one member of it shall follow them to the other world. Natural death soon puts a period to temporal joys. But the joy that awaits the Christian in a better world, shall never be extinguished, never impaired, never interrupted. Time will not allow to enlarge on this delightful subject. Let me entreat your patient attention to a few remarks on this eternal life, as opposed to eternal death; as free from every thing evil in temporal life, and as perfective of the spiritual life imparted by regeneration.

1. Eternal life will appear, to glorified saints, an inestimable blessing, when considered as opposed to that eternal death which they justly deserved, and of which they were once in extreme danger. They look upon the carcases of impenitent sinners, whose worm dieth not, whose fire shall not be quenched, and who shall be an abhorrence to all flesh; and thankfully acknowledge, "what they suffer, we also deserved to suffer, and must have eternally suffered, had not unmerited mercy pulled us as brands out of the burning." They hear the Judge of the quick and dead, pronounce the sentence on those on his left hand: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." And they thus reflect: "How dreadful the doom! To depart from Him, who is the Fountain of life! to be for ever banished from his presence, and depriv-
ed

^a Rev. xx. 4.; xxi. 4.

“ ed of every the least token of his love! In depart-
“ ing from God, they depart from all joy, all com-
“ fort, all hope. And whither must they depart?
“ Into fire; into pains utterly unsupportable; far
“ more exquisite than the severest tortures, that ever,
“ in this life, the most savage malice did inflict, or
“ the most fruitful self-tormenting melancholy ima-
“ gine: Into everlasting fire; anguish that must en-
“ dure, not for days, or months, or years, but for
“ the endless ages of eternity. All this, we too have
“ justly deserved. The eternal life we now possess,
“ is not the wages of our works. Had we received
“ that, eternal death had been our portion. But it
“ is the gift of God to us, through Jesus Christ our
“ Lord, O glorious Saviour, who hast delivered
“ us from going down to the pit, by paying our ran-
“ som! who, by thy own precious blood, hast re-
“ deemed us from those sore plagues that are of ever-
“ lasting continuance!”

2. Let us view eternal life, as free from every thing evil in temporal life. Man is born to misery, as the sparks fly upwards. Few and evil are the days of our pilgrimage. Sicknefs, poverty, reproach, losses, vexations, disappointments, and fears, are, in some measure, one or other of them, the lot of all mankind: and, to good men, the words of their Master have always been verified—“ In the world you shall have tribulation.” The worst treatment from the world, has been usually the portion of them, of whom the world was not worthy. Possibly, some few of them are placed in honourable and affluent circumstances, and have health and vigour to relish their outward comforts. Yet, what stings of sorrow do even such often feel, from the death, or the misfortunes,

tunes, of valuable friends and relations; from persons near and dear to them acting a base and dishonourable part; or, from such who owe them most, repaying their friendship with indifference or ingratitude. Here there is no gourd, under which we can shadow ourselves, but, sooner or later, a worm arises to destroy it. Our present situation, however agreeable, is uncertain and precarious, the thought of which, mingles gall and wormwood with all our delights. Our life here, is a changeable, sorrowful, and dying life. This one thing only is no uncertainty, that, as naked we came into the world, so, naked we must go hence. But, when eternal life commences, “God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.” The inhabitant of that good land, shall no more say, I am sick; the people that dwell there being forgiven their iniquity. There shall be nothing to hurt or destroy, nothing to grieve or disquiet, in all God’s holy mountain. The tongue of slander shall no more blast the character. There shall be no more death, yea, no more apprehension of it, either from the decays of age, the force of disease, or the assaults of violence. Was there any dread, lest the blessed should be banished from their delightful mansions, that dread would be as death in the pot, and, like a root of bitterness, would blast and wither every joy. But, while the saint in heaven enjoys all that his heart can wish, he enjoys it with the pleasing security, that nothing can bereave him of this transporting bliss. He feels himself completely happy: and he rejoices in the thought, that his circumstances shall

shall never change for the worse; that this his happiness shall never diminish; and that his taste for it shall never decay.

3. Let us view eternal life, as the full growth and perfection of spiritual life. Glorious indeed is the change, when one, dead in trespasses and sins, becomes spiritually alive, through Christ living in him; perceives the transcendent excellency of divine realities; feels the love of God shed abroad in his heart, and tastes that the Lord is gracious. Nevertheless, the spiritual life being only in its infancy, the joy resulting from it cannot be complete. Here, we know in part, and see darkly, and through a glass. Here, our devout affections are often weak and languid, our best frames of short continuance, and the strength of indwelling corruption such, that we cannot do the things that we would. Here, too, the Comforter often withdraws, and the God and Saviour of Israel hides himself. Where is the Christian who can say, he has already attained, and is already perfect? In spiritual life, we begin to know, to serve, to enjoy God. On this side the grave, that knowledge, service, and enjoyment, are greatly defective. But, when eternal life commences, that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect shall come. Since sin first infected our natures, the bodies of saints have been as prisons and fetters to their souls, defiling their purity, impairing their lustre, and wofully retarding in the practice of duty, and exercises of devotion. Death opens the prison doors, and knocks off the fetters; so that the immortal spirit, no longer restrained by a dull distempered clay tabernacle, finds itself at full liberty to act up to its true dignity. The complaint ceases, that though the spirit is willing, the
flesh

flesh is weak. The immortal spirit exerts an unwearied, undecaying vigour, in contemplating and adoring God, and in receiving the tokens of his love. And if, in this state of distance and imperfection, the life of the righteous is more excellent than that of his neighbour: what shall their life be, when they have attained the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ? In the religious services of the sanctuary, and of the closet, it is good for us to draw near to God. A view of his glory, in the glass of ordinances, transports and ravishes the heart. If it is thus with us, while at home in the body, and absent from the Lord: what may we not hope for, when absent from the body, and present with the Lord? In his presence is fulness of joy, of pure unmixed joy, without any alloy of pain; and at his right hand are rivers of pleasures for evermore. If our imperfect views of God, and the imperfect lineaments of his image, are a source of the sublimest delight; what must it be, to see Him face to face, to see Him as he is, to behold his face in righteousness, and to be satisfied with his likeness? The struggles of a body of sin and death, the temptations of Satan, the allurements of an evil world, the hidings of God's face, drowsiness and wanderings of thought in God's service, and whatever else hinders the holiness or happiness of the Christian, shall come to a perpetual end. The place of his abode, the society with which he stands connected, the frame of his heart, his services, his enjoyments, and, above all, his immediate constant communications from the fulness of a glorified Redeemer; shall nourish, strengthen, and increase that holiness, and that happiness. Every circumstance in his situation, shall be favourable to both; and, of all those

those spiritual good things, every saint shall have an uninterrupted possession, a quick apprehension, and lively relish.

Dost thou entertain these exalted prospects? Cultivate a temper and behaviour suited to them. This world is not thy home. Thou art bound for another, and a better world, which, ere long, shall be thine everlasting abode. Moderate, therefore, thy affections, to the pleasures and conveniences of this life. View them with the indifference of a prudent traveller, who has no special interest in them, little time to spare for enjoying them, and who will not be diverted by the best of them, from returning to his native land. Rejoice in thy earthly comforts, as though thou rejoicest not; remembering that thy happiness cannot be complete, till thou hast bid them an everlasting farewell. Think, speak, and act, as a pilgrim and stranger on earth, who here has no continuing city, but looks for one that is to come. Let thoughts of the heavenly bliss alleviate and sweeten every trial, knowing that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.

How unsuitable are slavish fears of death, in those who look for such things! Does death open to saints a passage to eternal glory? and, shall they be afraid to go home to their Father's house? afraid to enter into the kingdom of heaven? afraid to dwell with the best Friend they ever had, or can have? afraid to see an end of all their pains, of all their sorrows, of all their fears? To depart, and to be with Christ, is far better than the best thing they ever enjoyed, or can possibly enjoy, on this side the grave. Have they not rather cause to look and long for that blessed period,
when

when eternal life shall commence ; and, amidst the infirmities and decays of age, lift up their heads with joy, because the day of their complete redemption draweth near ?

When bereaved of our Christian friends, let us assuage our grief, by remembering, that our loss is their unspeakable gain. Dear as they are to us, they are still dearer to Christ, whose blessed will it is, that they be with him where he is, to behold his glory. If we love them, shall we repine at their happiness ? Is it indeed mournful, that they have exchanged a world of sin and sorrow, for a world of perfect holiness and consummate bliss ? Let us not weep for them, but weep for our sins, which have provoked the Lord to deprive us of them.

Is eternal life the portion of God's people ? and, must either this, or everlasting destruction, be our portion ?—How should this excite us to look chiefly, not at the things which are seen, and temporal, but at the things which are not seen, and eternal ? Short and uncertain as our life is, a happy or miserable eternity depends on the manner in which we improve it.

Through the patience and longsuffering of God, we have seen the end of another year ; a year of the right hand of the Most High ; a year remarkably crowned with God's goodness, and in which, his paths towards us have dropped fatness *. May the blessings of this year, to the Protestant Churches, to Britain and her colonies, to this city, and to us here assembled, and all our concerns, be still more abundant.—But, in this season of mirth and dissipation, permit me to remind you, that in so numerous an assembly,

* This part of the Discourse was preached in the New Church, Wednesday, 2d January 1760.

fembly, it is more than probable, some, nay, some now in the prime and vigour of life, may never see the end of this year. Perhaps, O unconverted sinner, thou hast only one week or day to live; and, if thy state is not then changed, thou must ly down in everlasting sorrow. Reflect on these warnings now, with the same seriousness and solemnity, with which undoubtedly thou must recollect them, when thou shalt stand before the judgement seat of Christ. At that awful period, the most stupid sinner shall be fully sensible, that it had been better for him that he had never been born, than that he should come short of that eternal life which once he despised. How will he gnash his teeth, in the violence of his anguish and despair, seeking death, but not finding it, desiring to die, but death flying from him! Extremity of pain, though only for a few hours, is hard to bear. Who then can conceive the dreadfulnes of a restless eternity? Wouldst thou purchase the pleasures of a ramble, or debauch, by enduring, for a month, the exquisite tortures of a gout or a gravel? And, dost thou think, that devouring flames, and everlasting burnings, will be more tolerable; and that, though a month of torture is shocking, an eternity of torture may be easily endured? If this appears to thee absurd, why dost thou, for the pleasures of sin which are but for a season, forfeit a blessed, and incur a miserable eternity? Think not that the hazard of this is small. "He that believeth not, shall be damned. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. Except thou repent, thou shalt certainly perish." These are the words of God, who cannot lie. The way of the many, is a way that leadeth down to the chambers of death. The multitude of thy fellow offenders,
must

must prove a poor claim for impunity. The gate is strait, and the way narrow, that leadeth to life ; and, it infinitely concerns thee, that thou be found among the happy few who know it, choose it, and walk in it.

PART III.

IV. I am now to consider the connexion of Christ's power over all flesh, with his giving eternal life to those given him of the Father ; and this will sufficiently appear, by viewing some exercises of this power, whereby he safely conducts that chosen number to the kingdom prepared for them, and there imparts to them fulness of bliss.

1. In virtue of this power, pastors and teachers, and ordinances, shall continue, for increasing and edifying the mystical body of Christ, until they all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. The Church is founded on a rock, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against her. Her enemies may gather themselves together ; but, sooner or later, they shall fall for her sake. No weapon formed against her, shall finally prosper. Notwithstanding the utmost efforts of earth and hell, the name of the Redeemer “ shall endure for ever : it shall be continued as long “ as the sun : men shall be blessed in him ; and all “ nations shall call him blessed ^a.” As for his enemies,

^a Pl. lxxii. 17.

mies, " the moth shall eat them up like a garment,
" and the worm shall eat them like wool : but, his
" righteousness shall be for ever, and his salvation
" from generation to generation ^b." " The words
" of the Lord are pure words : as silver tried in a
" furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt
" keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from
" this generation for ever ^c." Reason, raillery, per-
secution, though often employed to obscure the glory
of our holy religion, and, if possible, to root it out :
instead of gaining their end, have unwillingly contri-
buted to display her unfullied purity, her transcendent
beauty, her unconquerable strength. " All flesh is as
" grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the
" grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof
" falleth away : But the word of the Lord endureth
" for ever ; even that word which by the gospel is
" preached to you ^d." Writings of a sceptical or
infidel strain, the proud or licentious may for a season
admire. But, as a painted sepulchre secures not a
carcase from putrefaction : their smart wit, and ele-
gant style, shall not preserve them from falling into
that forgetfulness, or contempt, into which those have
deservedly fallen, who, in former periods, thus prosti-
tuted their talents. The interests of religion are infi-
nitely dear to the Ruler of the universe ; and there-
fore, no event can happen, truly prejudicial to those
interests. The enemies of the Church, though they
know it not, act under the direction and government
of her best friend. Whatever power they have, they
have it from him ; and even they cannot move one
step, without his permission. Well then may the
Church, even in her darkest days, and when every

I i

thing

^b II. li. 8.^c Pl. xii. 6, 7.^d 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

thing seems to threaten her utter destruction, yet hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God. Power was given to Christ for this very purpose, that the most political schemes of the enemies of his Church, might crush the cause they meant to support, and might build up, and strengthen, what they designed to destroy. The fate of empires; the advancement of learning; improvements in trade and navigation; the designs of the ambitious; friendships or quarrels, of which humour, interest, or resentment, were the true spring; have all been overruled, for promoting the kingdom of Jesus. This might be easily illustrated, did time allow, by observations on the first planting of Christianity in some parts of the world; on the glorious reformation from Popery; and on other amazing and important revolutions; in which, though some instruments were animated by the purest motives, yet the earth also remarkably helped the woman; and the avarice, ambition, or resentment of crafty and wicked men were overruled, to promote the glory of Christ, and the safety of his Church. When Jesus commissioned his apostles to teach and baptize all nations, he acquainted them, for their encouragement, that all power was given to him in heaven and in earth; and that he would be with them, and their successors in the ministry, always, even unto the end of the world. Hitherto, that promise hath been, and henceforth it shall continue to be accomplished. “The God of
“Heaven hath set up a kingdom, which shall never
“be destroyed: and that kingdom shall not be left to
“other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume
“all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

2. Christ's

^c Dan. ii. 44.

2. Christ's power over all flesh, appears in bringing his elect into the world, and preserving their natural life, till the happy moment of their conversion. Wicked parents are spared, that, in due time, the sons of the stranger may join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord: yea, that the sons of them that afflicted Zion may come bending unto her ^f. When the most heinous wickedness abounds, the long-suffering of God continues with a guilty people, for the sake of the elect, to descend from them. "Thus saith the Lord, As the
 " new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith,
 " Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do
 " for my servants sakes, that I may not destroy them
 " all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob,
 " and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains:
 " and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall
 " dwell therein ^g." For the same reason, patience is exercised towards the vessels of mercy in their unconverted state. He, without whom a sparrow falls not to the ground, and by whom the very hairs of our head are numbered, says unto them in their blood, Live. On their account, days of trouble are shortened. Providence restrains their own corruptions, or the corruptions of others, from exerting themselves so, as to end their lives. They are preserved from diseases and calamities, which prove fatal to many: or, when their soul draweth near to the grave, and their life to the destroyer; mercy interposes, heals their diseases, and redeems their lives from destruction. Though thousands fall at their right hand, and ten thousands at their left, death hath no power over them,

I i 2

till

^f If. lvi. 6.; lx. 14.^g If. lxx. 8, 9.

till their souls are sheltered under the covert of the Redeemer's righteousness.

3. Christ's power over all flesh appears, in so ordering the circumstances of the elect, that they shall enjoy the means of grace, public or private. Various methods he devises, that his banished be not for ever expelled from him. He, who hath the key of David, who opens and none can shut, and shuts and none can open; in one way or other, opens a great door, and an effectual, for their religious instruction. Sometimes, he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, sends to the place of their residence a faithful pastor, who feeds them with knowledge and sound understanding, and beseeches them, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God. Sometimes, pious friends and companions, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, are stirred up to recommend religion to them, from their own happy experience. Men, tenderly concerned for their welfare, address them as Moses did Habab: "h We are journeying unto the place, of
" which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou
" with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord
" hath spoken good concerning Israel." Providence governs, what the elect do, or what others connected with them do from mere worldly motives, for promoting their spiritual interest. A strange series of unlooked for events brings them, where they hear the gospel powerfully preached; or where they are blessed with the Christian example, instructions, and admonitions of neighbours and acquaintances. These remarks might easily be confirmed by a variety of instances. Paul must preach the gospel in Corinth, because the Lord had much people in that city. Philip
must

must go towards the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, that he might meet the Ethiopian eunuch, and preach to him Jesus. Multitudes, who, at the feast of Pentecost, came to Jerusalem, from all parts of the known world, had thereby an opportunity of hearing Peter's sermon, by which thousands were converted. Zacheus's curiosity, in climbing a sycamore tree to see Jesus, was the occasion of his conversion. And the woman of Samaria's coming to Jacob's well to draw water, when our Lord, wearied with a journey, had sat down there, gave an opportunity to her, and to many of the inhabitants of Sychar, of hearing the gracious words that proceeded from his lips, and that proved spirit and life to their souls.

4. Christ's power over all flesh, is exerted in the actual conversion of the elect. To open the eyes of the understanding, to speak effectually to the heart and conscience, and to raise men from a death in sin to a life of holiness, are glorious acts of the Mediator's power. When the Lord himself gives the word, the efficacy of the word is irresistible. When he says to Matthew, Follow me: Matthew arises, forsakes all, and follows him. When he looks on Peter: presently Peter goes out, and weeps bitterly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doth valiantly, when these promises are accomplished: "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." "Thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey

I i 3

“prey of the terrible shall be delivered ^k.” Thousands have been converted by one sermon, and a nation, as it were, born in a day. Thus, in the apostolic age, the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and every man pressed unto it. The Redeemer girt his sword on his thigh; and, in his majesty, rode prosperously, because of truth, meekness, and righteousness. His arrows were sharp in the hearts of his enemies, whereby the people fell under him. The fields were ripe for harvest. The ploughman overtook the reaper, and the treader of grapes, him that sowed seed. Thus, at the reformation from Popery, the Lord of the temple sat as a refiner and purifier of silver, that the offering of the spiritual Jerusalem might be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old. The instruments of that glorious work, out of weakness were made strong: and, through the good hand of their God upon them, mountains of opposition were levelled unto a plain. The word of the Lord had a free course, and was glorified: and, from the sound of the gospel trumpet, the walls of the Popish Jericho received a shock, which, we pray God, they may never recover. Even in our own age, divine grace hath, in signal instances, triumphed over men of various stations and characters. The weapons of the gospel warfare, mighty through God, have pulled down strong holds; cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and have brought into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

5. The Redeemer, in consequence of his power over all flesh, so orders every event that concerns his people, as tends to their best interests; and communicates
to

^k 1st. xlix. 25.

to them all the measures of strength and influence, of support and consolation, suited to their different wants and distresses. All his paths towards them, are mercy and peace. All things work together for their good. He, who is their sun and shield, suffers nothing truly evil to befall them, and withholds from them nothing truly good. No trial, or temptation, comes upon them beyond what they are able to bear; or, he makes for them a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it. If he chastens them, it is for their profit, that they may become, in a more plenteous measure, partakers of his holiness. He possesses a fulness of grace for all the members of his mystical body: and out of this fulness, they all receive, and grace for grace. Separated from him, the strongest of them can do nothing; cannot perform the easiest duty, resist the smallest temptation, mortify the weakest corruption. Through Christ strengthening; through the exceeding greatness of his power towards them that believe: the feeblest can do all things. He supports and upholds with the right hand of his righteousness; so that he who was weak among them becomes as David, and the house of David as an angel of the Lord. When the souls of his people are afflicted, tossed with tempests, and not comforted: the storm is turned into a calm, at his command and will. He creates the fruit of the lips, peace; and appoints unto them beauty for ashes; and for the spirit of heaviness, the garments of praise. Christians, who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage, find God the strength and joy of their hearts. Their latter end is peace. When walking through the valley and shadow of death, they fear no evil; for their God is with them, and his rod and staff comfort them. Many of

the most tender sex and age, to whom the distant prospect of persecution was shocking, through the abundance of divine supports and consolations, patiently endure the most exquisite tortures for the testimony of faith and of a good conscience; and, even in the midst of them, rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Apply to thyself, O friend of Jesus, those encouraging truths. Art thou afraid of one day falling by the hand of thine enemies? He, on whom thou believest, is able, and as willing as able, to keep what thou hast committed to him. Thy life is hid with Christ in God, and Christ must be conquered ere thou perish. Are thy wants many? Jesus can supply them all out of his glorious and inexhaustible riches. Feelest thou thy spiritual strength diminish, and thy graces languish and decay? And hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that he giveth power to the faint, and to them who have no might increaseth strength? He can compose thy anxious thoughts. He can humble thy pride. He can melt and soften thy rocky heart. He can strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die. The dead body of a prophet restored natural life. Much more can he, who, though crucified in weakness, was raised in strength, inspire and revive the divine life in thy soul. There is power in his death, and power in his resurrection: and, if by faith thou fly to him, thou shalt taste the comfortable fruits of that power. Art thou afraid lest thine iniquities should deprive thee of those blessings? The Son of man, who when on earth had power to forgive sin, hath not lost that power by ascending to heaven. At the right hand of God he is

now

now exalted, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. The power of the Lord is great, according as he hath proclaimed his name, the Lord God merciful and gracious. Do doubts and jealousies of your interest in Christ occasion you incessant torment? Come to him, ye that are thus heavy laden, and he will give you rest. He speaks like an absolute sovereign. Though Satan and your own hearts combine to exclude comfort : yet, at his command, comfort shall force an entrance ; and, when you expect it least, you shall find rest to your souls. Are the thoughts of death dreadful to you? He who liveth for evermore, and hath the keys of death and of the invisible world, will not forsake you, in your combat with the king of terrors, but will be your guide even unto the death.

6. Christ's power over all flesh shall appear in raising the dead bodies of his people, and reuniting them to their souls, in order to put them in the full possession of eternal happiness.

Much of divine skill is displayed in the formation of the human body. And though, by the apostasy, it hath lost a deal of that beauty and glory, with which it was originally adorned : yet, while it remains united to the soul, it is no despicable piece of workmanship. There is often that sweetness or majesty in the countenance, that sparkling radiancy in the eyes, that blooming complexion, those lively features and colours, that agreeable symmetry of parts, which charm and delight the stranger, much more the parent or friend.—But when death comes, how dreadful the desolation ! how rueful the spectacle ! The eyes, once so bright and animated, are now dull, depressed, sunk, closed ; the cheeks wan ; the lips pale. The sprightly

ly look is gone. Where beauty dwelt, ghastliness and deformity appear. The sight of those, once the desire of our eyes, is now doleful and shocking. Unable to bear it, we hide them in a dark and silent grave. There they lie, devoid of life and feeling, even as a stock or stone. The senses are locked up, and the active bodily members fettered. The eye no more beholds man, with the inhabitants of the world; no more views with pleasure or pain the things done under the sun; no more contemplates, with devout delight, the glories of God shining in his visible works; or with divine transport peruses in the sacred oracles the wonders of redeeming love. The voice whose music charmed, the tongue whose eloquence constrained, can no more utter the most feeble and inarticulate sound. The hands that guided the tools of the ingenious mechanic, wielded the weapons of war, handled the pen of the ready writer, or swayed the majestic sceptre, can no longer perform their office. The presence which here inspired hundreds with courage, and yonder dismayed thousands with terror, has now no respect paid it by the meanest reptile. Worms enter into and force every passage, insult the carcase, prey upon it, feast themselves, till having devoured the fleshy substance, they leave the bones dry and bare, which in process of time moulder into dust.

But, O thou last enemy, shalt thou for ever triumph? Shall these long desolations never come to an end? Shall human nature for ever lie in ruin; that nature, which the Former of all things deigned to assume, and died to restore? No. He who hid his people in the chambers of the grave, hath appointed a time, when he will again remember them, and manifest his gracious respect to the work of his hands. He
that

that cometh, O friend of Jesus, shall come, and shall not tarry. Death would be melancholy indeed, if thy body, consumed in the grave, was detained a perpetual prisoner in that pit of corruption, never more to see the light. The light of the natural sun thou mayest never more behold. But thou shalt arise, and behold a light more sweet and glorious. Though after thy skin worms devour thy body, yet in thy flesh shalt thou see God. Because thy Saviour lives, thou shalt live also. The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live. The last enemy shall be destroyed, even death. Christ shall change the vile bodies of his people, and fashion them like unto his own glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able to subdue even all things to himself.—In what exalted strains does he foretel, or at least allude to this wonderful transaction! “^m I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death! I will be thy plagues; O grave! I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”—How beautifully does the apostle Paul triumph in the prospect of all this! “ⁿ O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But, thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then shall the power of Christ over all flesh, shine forth in its meridian splendour: when He, who hath gone to heaven to prepare a place for his people, will come again, to receive them to himself, that where he is, there they may be also; and when all shall appear before his judgement seat, and by his sentence be fixed for ever in happiness or in misery. Then shall

^m Hof. xiii. 14.ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their father.

7. Christ's power over all flesh shall appear, in ruling his church in heaven, and imparting to them the blessings of glory. "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom, there shall be no end." It seems absurd to suppose, that he, who is emphatically termed the Prince of Peace, shall enjoy his power, only while wars and opposition remain, and shall be divested of it when enemies are conquered, and peace established by their destruction. No, my brethren, he shall for ever continue the king of his church, the channel through which all their bliss is conveyed, the bond of their union with God, and the medium of their access to him.—The spring and security of all the happiness of saints in heaven, is shortly this: "P The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." Every enjoyment will be enhanced to them, and doubly relished, when received from the hands, which, for their redemption, were nailed to the accursed tree. Scarcely could Christ be said to give eternal life to as many as were given him by the Father, if he only bestowed on them the first fruits of that life, not the full harvest. Imagine not, that when Christ has conducted you to the palace of the Father, his relation to you as mediator, and his acts of kindness to you, in consequence of that relation, cease. No. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. His throne is for ever and ever. And it is the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, into which an entrance shall be ministered abundantly to his faithful subjects ^q. Christ is called

^o Luke i. 33.

^p Rev. vii. 17.

^q 2 Pet. i. 11.

called our life ^r, which, as is evident from the context, must mean, that as he now imparts to us the blessings of grace, so hereafter he will impart to us the blessings of glory. When the marriage of the Lamb is come, the Church will not receive less from her heavenly husband, than when she was only espoused to him. And when the redeemed shall reign for ever and ever, surely the Redeemer shall not cease to reign.

I know, that many learned and pious divines, have taught a different doctrine, and argued speciously in support of it, from 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25, 28. But, in matters of faith, calling no man master, we ought to bring every opinion to the touchstone of the sacred oracles; and to explain, what is more dark and obscure, in a way consistent with what is more clear and explicit. *Christ shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father.* But, as the Father did not cease to reign, when all power was given to Christ in heaven and in earth: so neither shall the Son cease to reign, when he delivers up the kingdom to the Father. As the Father's reign shall not then begin, so the Son's reign shall not then terminate. The kingdom, therefore, in this passage, means the subjects of the kingdom. Christ having completed the salvation of every one of them, shall present them all to the Father, saying, "Behold I, and the children which God hath given me." He shall give an account of what he did on earth, in consequence of the trust committed to him; and shall claim, that the purchase of his blood, and the conquests of his grace, may inherit the kingdom to which they are thus entitled, and for which they have been thus prepared.

The

The king of Zion *must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.* But to infer from this, that he must reign no longer, is as absurd, as it would be to infer, from Michal the daughter of Saul having no child until the day of her death ^s, that after her death, she had a child. David says ^t, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Lest this should lead to false notions of the duration of Christ’s kingdom: we are told ^u, “That he for ever sat down on the right hand of God.”

We are informed ^x, that “*when all things shall be subject to him, then shall the Son also himself be subject to him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.*” But this neither proves, that Christ’s power over all flesh ends, or that his subjection to the Father commences with the general resurrection. Both in the purchase and application of salvation, Christ always acted as the Father’s righteous servant. And in scripture, things are often said to happen, when they are known, and made manifest. We have three instances of this in one chapter, Rom. iii. 4. “Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar;” *i. e.* Let God be acknowledged true, and every man accounted a liar, who arraigns the divine faithfulness. ver. 19. “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God;” *i. e.* May appear to be guilty, may have their guilt manifested. ver. 26. “That God might be just;” *i. e.* That he might appear to be just.—Let me apply these observations to the present subject,

^s 2 Sam. vi. 23.

^u Heb. x. 12.

^x Ps. cx. 1.

^x 1 Cor xv. 58.

subject. The apostle to the Hebrews having told us ⁷, that God hath put all things under Christ's feet, yea left nothing that is not put under him: immediately adds, "but now we see not yet all things put under "him." In like manner, if we know the Mediator's subjection to the Father, it is now by faith, not by sight: but, after the resurrection, when Christ shall give an account of all he hath done for the salvation of those given him by the Father, that subjection shall be more fully manifested to the whole rational creation. Thus, the spirits of the prophets are said to be subject to those other prophets, who judge what they have spoken ². Indeed, the Son, as head of the redeemed, shall through all eternity acknowledge, that in the glorious scheme of man's redemption, all things are of God: and shall lead the worshippers of the higher house, in their expressions of reverence, love and subjection, to his Father and their Father, his God and their God. Thus, there is nothing in this passage, inconsistent with the clear declarations in other passages of scripture, that Christ's mediatory relations to his people shall continue for ever, and that he shall eternally exert his power, in consequence of those relations, for their benefit. And, if this is indeed one branch of the Redeemer's revealed glory, doubtless it concerns us, to ascribe it to him. I conclude with the words of the Psalmist ³, which, I think it evident from the 7th verse, relate not so much to the general doctrine of providence, as to Christ's mediatory kingdom: "The LORD reigneth, let the "earth rejoice: let the multitude of isles be glad "thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about "him:

⁷ Heb. ii. 8.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 32. compared with ver. 29.

³ Ps. xcvi. 1, 2.

“ him : righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne.” If the grace and power of their king, though seen by the children of Zion, in the land of their pilgrimage, only darkly and through a glass, are thus acknowledged and adored : what shall be their transports of joy and of praise, when the mystery of God shall be finished ; the intricate plans of providence and grace unravelled ; and rectitude, wisdom and love, shall shine conspicuous in the dispensations at which they had most stumbled, when they spoke, and thought, and understood as children !



FINIS.

l.
f
n
n
l
e
s
s
y